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President: Mr. Kavan ..... (Czech Republic)

In the absence of the President, Ms. Jarbussynova (Kazakhstan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 36 (*continued*)

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/57/470, A/57/621)

Draft resolutions (A/57/L.44, A/57/L.45)

Mr. Nguyen Thanh Chau (Viet Nam): There is hardly an issue that has attracted more attention by the United Nations and the international community than the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Year after year at this forum, we have debated the same topics — the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine — while the region is gradually turning into a powder keg. Punctuated by several bloody wars and successive flare-ups of armed conflict, followed by Israel's occupation of the lands legitimately belonging to the Palestinian Arabs, it has become a constant serious concern of the international community. Violence breeds the desire for vengeance, and the vicious circle thus thrives. Hatred spills across national borders, and the love-thy-neighbour spirit is lost forever in this holy part of the world.

No one benefits from this precarious situation. For Israel and other neighbouring countries, it must be an uneasy feeling of insecurity; but for the Palestinians, it is the feeling of being denied their inalienable rights for so long, including the right to self-determination and to establishment of the statehood they deserve. And the world community suffers, too. The recent killing of a United Nations relief worker in Jenin camp is just additional solid testimony to this painful fact.

Sheer force of arms cannot solve the problem. The only option to this conflict is to peacefully negotiate a solution that caters for the legitimate interests of all parties concerned. This makes the peace process all the more important and urgent.

This year, the Security Council adopted resolutions 1397 (2002), 1402 (2002) and 1403 (2002), which are relevant to this question, while a number of debates and discussions continued at other United Nations forums since the last United Nations General Assembly session. It is deeply regrettable, however, that the situation in the Middle East remains dangerously explosive, and the prospect of peace is drifting away.

The miserable plight of the Palestinians is a direct consequence of the acts of war and occupation by Israeli forces. It is deeply rooted in a political issue. These people suffer every time there is trouble in the region. For the last 50 years, millions of Palestinians have become refugees on their own land, struggling hard to make both ends meet. In addition, prolonged military curfews and strict travel restrictions by Israel gravely affect the normal lives of these people. The

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international community has tried its best to deliver assistance.

In this connection, we commend the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for its painstaking efforts to help the Palestinian people, even with its very tight budget. We also commend donor countries, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and other bodies for their generous contributions which help ease the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Viet Nam's position is crystal clear on this issue and is lucidly contained in a message by the President of Viet Nam, His Excellency Mr. Tran Duc Luong, addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with Palestinian people, 29 November. He said:

"Together with the international community, Viet Nam wishes to express its grave concern over the ongoing escalation of violence in the Middle East, especially when the Palestinian National Authority and the international community are trying to work out a peaceful solution to the conflict. More than ever before, Viet Nam calls upon all parties concerned to do their best to push forward with the peace process and implement fully the signed agreements, especially those accords achieved at the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit and the Mitchell Plan, in order to find, as soon as possible, a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, putting an end to these acts of violence. Such a solution must ensure the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. including the right to self-determination, the return of refugees and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, as well as the rights of all parties concerned, on the basis of the land for peace principle and of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) of the Security Council and other signed agreements."

The story of Samson and Delilah told of a young couple's love across the dividing line, laced with betrayal and manoeuvres, which resulted in destruction and death. Let us just take it as a legend. Let the international community and all parties concerned in this conflict join in good faith in concerted efforts to ensure that the modern Samson and Delilah can live happily ever after in peace and harmony.

Mr. Requeijo Gual (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The debate on agenda item 36, on the situation in the Middle East, comes at an extremely critical moment, in the absence of any current negotiations in the search for peace amid an unprecedented spiral of violence. There are no signs anywhere of the possibility of beginning a constructive and serious dialogue leading to a just and lasting peace that would benefit, first, all peoples of the region and, thus, all humankind.

The ongoing deadly cycle of violence and reprisals has exacerbated political tensions and has caused an unprecedented number of dead and wounded in recent months, most of them innocent civilians, including a considerable number of children. To them, we must add the tens of thousands of families mourning the loss of their loved ones and living in precarious conditions, constantly threatened with death and destruction. That road cannot lead anywhere. Violence, destruction and the use of military force can in no way lead to a definitive resolution of the conflict.

Fifty-five years ago, the Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which recognized the partition and the creation of two independent States, one Arab and one Jewish, which were to coexist in peace and harmony. More than half a century later, the situation is still bleak. The State of Israel was created in 1948, but the creation of the State of Palestine remains a just aspiration that is yet to be realized.

The scene before us today is cause for despair. Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese Arab territories are still occupied by Israel, in flagrant violation of the numerous resolutions of the Assembly and the Security Council that request the immediate return of those territories. The Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and to the creation of their own independent and sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, are yet to be respected.

Despite the demands of the international community that Israel halt the establishment of new settlements and the confiscation of lands, Israeli settlements continue to expand, especially in the occupied West Bank, including the outskirts of East Jerusalem. That illegal practice violating international law must be halted immediately.

There is still no definitive solution to the situation of the approximately 4 million Palestinian refugees both in and outside the occupied territories. This is one of the issues on which no progress could be

made during the peace-process negotiations begun in Madrid more than a decade ago.

The United Nations is faced with one of the most difficult of tasks, and one which has dragged on virtually since the Organization's foundation. It is regrettable that the Security Council is hostage to the dictates of a Power that uses its veto or the threat of the veto to prevent the implementation of the Council's own resolutions. In fulfilling the Council's obligations, double standards must be forever eliminated if the Council wishes to preserve its credibility.

As the Secretary-General notes in his observations in his report (A/57/621), the idea behind the preambular section of Security Council resolution 1397 (2002) of 12 March 2002, which supports the existence in the Middle East of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders, is vital for sustainable peace in the region.

Now, what has actually been done since March to put an end to all acts of violence? It is painful to recognize that hardly anything has been done. Has any step been taken to put an end to the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories? Why could a United Nations fact-finding mission not be sent to assess on the ground the events of last April in the Jenin refugee camp, despite the adoption of Security Council resolution 1405 (2002) of 19 April 2002, which welcomed the Secretary-General's initiative in that respect? Everyone here knows the answers to those questions.

As is universally recognized, a definitive and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, which is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, is fundamental to achieving a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, while not neglecting the necessary progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the issue.

Israel must end its occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan Heights and the areas of southern Lebanon that remain under the control of the Israeli army. All Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on the situation in the Middle East must be fully complied with, without exception or discrimination, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

We must proceed to the adoption of more effective measures on the ground, such as the deployment of an international force, under United Nations mandate, to protect the civilian Palestinian population. Moreover, the United Nations must play an effective and genuinely impartial role in any negotiating process that is undertaken, without any interference deemed unacceptable to the parties, so that they can recover their confidence in the mediators.

In those efforts for peace — as necessary as they are urgent — the international community can rely, as always, on Cuba's constructive contribution and its firm support and solidarity. In that regard, my delegation calls on the Assembly to vote in favour of the two draft resolutions submitted under this item, which stress that the road towards peace in the Middle East is one of understanding and not one of confrontation.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): Several days ago, we commemorated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The many messages of sympathy conveyed on that occasion to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People reflected eloquently the international community's ongoing interest in the thorny question of the Middle East — an interest particularly revived by the current context, which is marked by a paroxysm of violence.

My country, Burkina Faso, is following closely and with concern the alarming development of the situation, in which the stumbling block — apart from the general problem — is unquestionably the occupation of Palestinian lands. In fact, the Israeli policy of systematic colonization of Palestinian territories and of expropriation and even banishment of their populations is the principal cause of this persistent tension, punctuated daily by suicide bombings, military raids and repressive acts of all kinds. All of that has resulted in an enormous loss of human life, in material damage and in the destruction of neighbourhoods and houses, among other things. What is most deplorable is that most of the victims are children.

It is far from our intention to condemn anyone, but we must recognize that Israel, by weakening the Palestinian Authority, by subjecting the occupied territories to its legislation and by desecrating holy places, is antagonizing organizations that have no other

choice but to express themselves through violence. Israel's abusive use of force and the legitimate reaction to it have led to many arrests and even to extrajudicial killings.

Thus, the conflict in the Middle East is entering its fifty-fourth year — 1948 to 2002 — without real hope for a solution or for lasting peace on the horizon. But the fact that we find ourselves in an impasse does not mean that we should utterly despair. Indeed, many diplomatic initiatives are currently under way that could provide a chance for a resumption of the political process, the precondition being, of course, that acts of violence cease. The protagonists must agree to a ceasefire and must commit to signing a *modus vivendi* that rules out any act of violence during the period of the resumption of negotiations.

With regard to solutions that should be emphasized, first and foremost is the Saudi plan, or the Abdullah plan, unanimously adopted by the Council of the League of Arab States at the Beirut Summit, held on 27 March 2002. What does the plan recommend? It recommends the cessation of hostilities and the establishment of normal relations with Israel on the basis of a peace treaty, in exchange for Israel's return of territories that it occupied in 1967 and its acceptance of the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State. After all, that principle — of land for peace — has already been endorsed by the international community in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), reaffirmed by the Madrid Conference in 1991, approved by the European Union and very recently reaffirmed again by Council resolution 1397 (2002).

Upon careful analysis, the plan is an honourable solution, because it takes the desires of the parties into account and is widely supported by the international community. Moreover, the Security Council has fundamentally changed in its approach to the Middle East. In fact, it now supports the idea of two States — Israel and an independent Palestinian State — living side by side in peace and harmony. Furthermore, it is encouraging to note that the question has inspired individual as well as collective initiatives, such as the Tenet plan, the Mitchell report and, more recently, the peace plan of the Quartet — comprising the United States, Europe, the United Nations and Russia — whose ambition is to create a Palestinian State in 2005, with Israel's support and headed by the current President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, who would allow a certain number of institutional reforms. We think those are opportunities to seize without any further delay.

The advent of peace — a lasting peace — in the Middle East requires acceptance of an agreement entered into freely by the two parties on an equal basis. The protagonists of the Middle East have no choice but to negotiate, because more than 50 years of war, confrontation and violence have transpired there without leading to any kind of victory. In any case, the final solution will not come from military supremacy. History has taught us many times that a people's will and resistance to injustice always triumph over military force. The only remaining alternative, therefore, is to negotiate peace — the peace of the brave — on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

Mr. Mbanefo (Nigeria): The situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine would seem to be one of the most intractable problems on the agenda of the United Nations. It is a matter of regret that this situation persists despite the efforts on the part of the international community, as well as our collective good will, to end the cycle of violence in that region, which has continued to escalate, defying all efforts for a genuine and sustainable peace. The escalation of violence between Israelis and Palestinians in recent times is a matter of great concern. It is condemnable, and should not be allowed to continue a day longer.

The various military incursions by Israel — including Operation Defensive Shield and incursions into Bethlehem, Jenin and Nablus — and the deliberate humiliation and isolation of the Palestinian leader are as deplorable as the spate of suicide-bombing attacks on schools, markets and other public places carried out against Israel by certain Palestinian elements. All of those actions are clear violations of the Madrid and Oslo accords. The international community cannot, and should not, allow that wanton destruction of lives and property to continue.

Nigeria believes that a just and lasting solution to the thorny question of Palestine must be the basis for the establishment of sustainable peace in the region. It must also be consistent with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Consequently, Nigeria joins others in demanding the withdrawal of Israel from Palestine territory occupied since 1967. We also call for respect for the right of all

States in the region to live in peace and within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Nigeria is committed to a peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict, and therefore calls upon the parties to resume the peace process and move towards lasting peace in the region. My delegation firmly believes that no progress is likely to be attained until the core issues central to the Middle East crisis are addressed. Those include the occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories, violence, terrorism and the economic situation in Palestine. Consequently, Nigeria calls on the General Assembly to address the security concerns of the State of Israel as well as the political aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Nigeria is deeply concerned that the inhabitants of the Syrian Golan continue to live under foreign occupation. My delegation therefore considers the continued existence and expansion of settlements in the Golan and the reluctance to guarantee the security of the parties to be a major stumbling block to peace. We call on the parties concerned to adopt flexible policies and to resume peace negotiations on the principle of land for peace, which, in our opinion, will guarantee long-term peace and security in the region.

In that respect, Nigeria supports General Assembly resolutions 56/31 and 56/32, both of 3 December 2001, on the issues of Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan, respectively. We also support Security Council Resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 478 (1980).

My delegation notes from the Secretary-General's report on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) that peace was maintained in the Israel-Syria sector. However, the situation remains tense and we continue to be apprehensive about the impact of the presence of landmines on UNDOF personnel and innocent civilians living in the area.

On the issue of Lebanon, my delegation notes that while there has been some progress in the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) following Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, the situation there remains unstable. The disturbing developments along the Blue Line of withdrawal between Israel and Lebanon, including mortar and rocket attacks from southern Lebanon across the Blue Line, has the potential to threaten regional peace and security. My delegation agrees with the Secretary-General that no party should violate the Blue Line.

It is our belief that the situation in the Middle East calls for compromise by all the parties concerned, as reiterated pursuant to Security Council resolution 338 (1973). Nigeria will continue to support the efforts of the Secretary-General in favour of the presence of UNDOF in the region. We also welcome the agreement between Syria and Israel in that regard.

Nigeria supports the call by the Secretary-General for the establishment of a third-party mechanism to quell violence and foster progress on the volatile issue of the Middle East. We also endorse the idea of holding an international conference, as proposed by the United States Secretary of State after the meeting of the Quartet comprised of the United States, the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations that was held in Washington, D.C., on 2 May 2002. My delegation will continue to support all multilateral initiatives aimed at a speedy return of the parties to peace negotiations. Nigeria calls on the Quartet, regional partners and other sponsors of the peace process to ensure timely resumption of the peace process, pursuant to Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

My delegation reiterates our support for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Equally, we support the vision of two States: the State of Israel living within secure and recognized borders and an independent and viable Palestine, both living side by side in peace and security, as affirmed by Security Council resolution 1397 (2002). Nigeria commends the speech made by the President of the United States of America on 24 June 2002 on the question of a road map towards establishing a Palestinian State within three years. We call upon the parties involved to heed that advice, abandon violence and pursue the peace process.

My delegation wishes to reiterate the commitment of Nigeria to the ultimate goal of a negotiated peace between Israel and Lebanon, on the one hand, and Israel and Syria, on the other, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973); the initiative of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, which was endorsed at the Summit of the League of Arab States held on 28 March 2002; the Madrid meetings of 17 and 18 July 2001; and the principle of land for peace.

In conclusion, Nigeria commends the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, who is also the Secretary-General's Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority and the Personal Representative of the Secretary General to southern Lebanon, on the coordination of the work of the United Nations and international assistance to the Palestinian people and Lebanon, respectively. My delegation also commends the men and women who have served, and are serving, with UNDOF and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon for their courage and commitment to the cause of international peace and security.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): Since the start of the intifada more than 1,800 Palestinians and more than 600 Israelis have been killed in the Middle East. Innocent civilians, including many children, die regularly in terrorist attacks and military operations. A United Nations officer was recently shot and killed. The violence shows no signs of stopping, yet the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships are scarcely communicating, let alone negotiating a peaceful settlement.

There is a need for urgent and concerted external initiatives. Norway therefore supports the work of the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and the Russian Federation on an ambitious road map for peace in the Middle East by 2005. If it is followed, such a road map, supported by a strong and well-functioning monitoring mechanism, could lead the traumatized Israeli and Palestinian peoples to a comprehensive and lasting peace based on all relevant Security Council resolutions and previous agreements. To succeed, the road map will require the full cooperation of both sides.

While Israel has the right to defend itself against terrorism, we nonetheless call on Israel to stop the heavy military operations in densely populated areas, which often result in civilian casualties. We call on Israel to stop extrajudicial killings, to ease curfews and closures and to facilitate the resumption of economic and social activities in the Palestinian area. We particularly urge Israel to stop its settlement activities on occupied land. These continuing activities are eroding Palestinian trust and undermining the prospects for progress under the Quartet road map.

At the same time, we call on the Palestinian Authority to take an unequivocal stand against terrorism and to fight it vigorously by building a consensus in Palestinian society against such activity. We say to all Palestinian factions and groups engaged in terrorism that their methods have achieved nothing but misery and grief. Their actions are destroying the moral and economic foundation of a future Palestinian State. They must stop killing innocent civilians, disarm and engage in a democratic political process.

The violence has serious consequences for the humanitarian and economic situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which has deteriorated to alarming levels. The Palestinian Authority is effectively bankrupt. Public services have partly collapsed. Poverty is spreading fast. These developments are breeding resentment and feeding terrorism. This is not in Israel's interest. Thus, for the sake of its own security, Israel should without delay disburse the taxes that have been withheld from the budget of the Palestinian Authority.

In the present very difficult circumstances, Norway remains committed to its role as Chairman of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians. An Ad Hoc Liaison Committee donor meeting should be organized as soon as possible to address these urgent issues. Timely action by the donor community will be an indispensable complement to the efforts of the Quartet to get the peace process back on track.

The destinies of the Israelis and the Palestinians are inseparable. Security for the Israelis depends on security for the Palestinians, and vice versa. Peace can be achieved only through mutual compromise. The road to peace may be arduous and painful, but both parties must now join the international community in recognizing that the best way to end this tragic conflict is to work with determination towards the goal of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders by 2005.

Mr. Gatilov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The situation in the Middle East remains one of the priority items on the agenda of the General Assembly. Unfortunately, we must note that, with regard to the turbulent developments in the region, the past year was marked by an unprecedented crisis in relations between the Palestinians and the Israelis. The efforts made have not yet been able to break the

vicious cycle of violence, terrorist acts and forcible retribution, the victims of which are civilians on both sides. As a result, mutual distrust and despair are growing and the prospects for a resumption of the peace dialogue are deteriorating. Despite the assistance of international organizations and donor countries, the humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian territories has assumed catastrophic dimensions.

Against this backdrop, the Russian Federation calls on both sides not to succumb to extremist provocation or to allow violent confrontation to be exacerbated. Violence cannot be justified by any motive. It only claims further victims, perpetuates crises and does irreparable damage to the interests of the Palestinian people and to the prospects for the achievement of their national aspirations. Russia, which is facing the manifestations of an ongoing terrorist war being waged against it, decisively condemns the activities of all those who have chosen terror as a means of achieving their own aims.

We welcome the steps taken by the leaders of the Palestinian National Authority to identify the organizers of terrorist acts and to suppress their activities. We believe that, despite the difficulties, the Palestinian authorities should continue decisively to combat the terrorist infrastructure.

Tangible results, however, can be achieved only if the Israeli leadership exercises restraint and stops attacking Palestinian towns and refugee camps and reoccupying the territories under the control of the Palestinian Authority. It is essential that the economic blockade of the territories be lifted, that financial revenues owed to the Palestinians be released, and that unimpeded access to all Palestinian areas be given to international humanitarian organizations. It is absolutely unacceptable that the property of organizations that assist the Palestinians be damaged. In this respect, we share the concern of the Secretary-General over the activities of Israeli troops who, on 2 December, destroyed a warehouse of the World Food Programme in Gaza. Unless Israel fulfils its obligations, we cannot hope for successful Palestinian reforms. Of course, there must be an immediate halt to Israeli settlement in the occupied territories.

The leaders of Israel and the Palestinian national administration must assume their lofty political responsibilities and do their utmost to resume the negotiating process in order to achieve mutually acceptable solutions on the basis of the road map elaborated by the international mediators of the Quartet.

The Russian delegation reaffirms the legitimate right of the Palestinians to establish their independent State and the right of Israel to secure and peaceful existence within internationally recognized borders, as established in Security Council 1397 (2002). To that end, we call on the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to cooperate closely with the international mediators and other actors in order to achieve a peaceful settlement on the basis of the two-State concept. The Arab peace initiative launched at the summit of the League of Arab States in Beirut, is consonant with those efforts.

The Russian Federation reaffirms that a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East can be achieved only through negotiations on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). To achieve such a peace the Israelis and the Palestinians must resolve the key problems during the negotiating process. But genuine peace in the Middle East is impossible unless normal relations are established between Israel, Syria and Lebanon. As a co-sponsor of the peace process and an active participant in the Quartet of international facilitators, Russia will vigorously continue its efforts in this area to seek to overcome the crisis and to bring about a comprehensive Middle East settlement.

Mr. Manis (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express our thanks to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his report on the situation in the Middle East (A/56/470). It is also my pleasure, Madam, to see you presiding over this important meeting.

My delegation attaches the utmost importance to developments in the Middle East peace process because they have clear repercussions for issues of international peace and security. Tragic events in the region caused by violations perpetrated by the Israeli army, the widening spiral of violence, Israel's arrogance and its flouting of the principles international legitimacy and fundamental human rights all warn of further complications and tension in the Middle East region.

The practices of the Israeli occupation Government, its policies of killing, destroying, closures, the demolition of homes and infrastructure, the State terrorism vis-à-vis the unarmed Palestinian

people and the blocking of needed humanitarian assistance have all increased security tensions. They have heightened feelings of bitterness among the Palestinians and have led to an escalation of all kinds of legitimate resistance to regain their stolen rights. Violence, as we all know, breeds more violence.

Israeli forces have occupied Arab lands in the Syrian Golan since 1967. The occupying Power continues to seize land from Arab Syrian citizens, preventing them from using their agricultural resources, from drilling artesian wells and from building water reservoirs. Israeli occupation forces use various means of intimidation, humiliation and torture against the population in contravention of the resolutions of international legitimacy adopted by the Assembly and by the Economic and Social Council. Those acts violate the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other instruments.

Israel must be compelled to withdraw fully from the Arab lands it has occupied since 4 June 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the occupied Syrian Golan and the Lebanese Sheba'a farms, in implementation of the principle of land for peace and relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, in particular General Assembly resolution 181 (II) and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002).

The continuing occupation of the Syrian Golan is a grave obstacle to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East region. It is further essential to call on Israel to release Palestinian prisoners and Lebanese and Syrian detainees held in Israeli jails.

The most important duty of this Organization, in the light of the growing military arsenal used by Israel to perpetrate its crimes in the region, is to disarm Israel of its nuclear weapons, as it is the sole nuclear Power in the region. The elimination of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East would surely achieve the necessary military equilibrium, which would in turn achieve stability.

Mr. Al-Jomae (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Since the end of the Second World War, the Middle East region has undergone a series of wars and acts of destruction as a result of an Israeli policy which is based on occupation, settlement and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes. The United Nations has made many efforts to achieve a just resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and has adopted hundreds of resolutions. Israel, however, has refused to implement those resolutions, in defiance of the will of the international community. Israel thus continues its occupation of the Palestinian territories, the Syrian Golan and parts of Lebanese territory. We need not provide a detailed description of the daily acts of aggression and the violations perpetrated by Israel. The world sees, hears and reads every day about new Israeli crimes in the region. The way out of this dilemma lies in the implementation by Israel of the resolutions of international legality.

Just and comprehensive peace in our region can be achieved only through the implementation of the resolutions of international legality, which call for Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied since 1967. They also call for ensuring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to the establishment of their independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

While all the State of the region have acceded to the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Israeli continues to refuse to do so. It has kept its nuclear programmes outside the scope of international supervision, which constitutes a grave threat to the security and stability of the region. The Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia calls today, more than ever before, for strenous and serious efforts to be made to render our region free of weapons of mass destruction. My Government is gravely concerned about Israel's refusal to accede to the NPT. The Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia rejects the policy of double standards that exempts Israel from nuclear disarmament efforts, thus encouraging an arms race in the region.

The international community has committed itself to respecting the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq. It is the duty of all Members States in our region to commit themselves to the implementation of resolutions of international legality. Proceeding from such duty, my Government has welcomed the return of international inspectors to Iraq, and it calls upon the Iraqi Government to fulfil the requirements of Security

Council resolutions in order to spare the regime the scourge of war.

Mr. Al-Hussein (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has been worsening for more than two years. It continues to deteriorate in the light of the security policies that Israel continues to employ against the Palestinian leadership and people. Illegal Israeli practices, including around-the-clock curfews in Palestinian cities, closures and restriction on the freedom of movement, have resulted in what started as an economic crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories but has now deteriorated into a humanitarian emergency of grave concern.

Israeli policies are based on targeted killings, arbitrary detention and arrests, the targeting of civilians in the Palestinian territories, destruction of their houses and stripping of their land, in flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, and the continued construction of additional settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. These policies, resulting in the deterioration of the situation and increased pain and suffering of the Palestinian people, have been condemned internationally and have proven ineffective. They are by no means the way to exit from the crisis and will not put an end to violence. Nor do these policies support the international efforts being deployed to resume the political process and return to the track of peace.

Therefore, we call upon Israel to put an end to its occupation of all Palestinian cities without delay and to withdraw from the Palestinian cities re-occupied since September 2000, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 1402 (2002) and 1435 (2002), and to put an end to the closures and blockades of these cities. We also call upon Israel to refrain from its exclusionary security practices and to adopt more positive policies aimed at restoring confidence and trust between the two sides. Accordingly, Israel should begin by paying the tax revenues owed to the Palestinian Authority, an amount that exceeds $700 million, in order to alleviate the economic difficulties that the Palestinian Authority faces and to enable the Authority to provide the necessary services to Palestinian society. We call on Israel to cooperate in facilitating access of humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people and to provide free passage and movement to personnel of international humanitarian organizations inside the occupied Palestinian territories.

The violence that Israel is practising in the occupied Palestinian territories has become a main source of frustration and desperation among the Palestinian people. It contributes directly to strengthening the role of extremist organizations on both sides — organizations that seek to destroy whatever remains of the peace process. The main reason for the violence in the Palestinian territories is the continued Israeli occupation of those territories for more than 35 years and the pursuit of settlement activities there throughout that entire period.

I wish to stress once again my Government's position which condemns the killing of innocent civilians, be they Palestinians killed by the Israeli occupation forces or Israeli civilians killed in suicide bombings carried out in Israel.

The only way to end the Arab-Israeli conflict is through the resumption of the political process on the basis of the terms of reference of the Madrid Peace Conference, which emphasize full Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in 1967, namely, all Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

In that context, I also wish to emphasize the importance of the commitment of all United Nations Members to the implementation of Security Council resolutions without discrimination. Those resolutions are binding on all Members. Article 25 of the Charter states that the Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions — for example, the resolutions of the Security Council — in accordance with the Charter. Thus, Article 25 does not distinguish between Security Council resolutions under Chapter VI or Chapter VII of the Charter.

The peace process should be resumed on the basis of a clear road map that identifies the obligations of both sides — the Palestinians and the Israelis — with a specific timetable leading to the establishment, within three years' time, of an independent Palestinian State in the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, and in conjunction with the vision of the President of the United States, George Bush, of the establishment of two States living side by side in peace. We hope that the road map crowning the efforts of the Quartet will

be finalized, issued on the proposed date this month and implemented after it has been adopted by all concerned parties.

This road map should be comprehensive, addressing all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It should also include a monitoring and evaluation mechanism that begins with the first stage of the implementation process. It should be dealt with as an indivisible package in terms of accepting or rejecting its elements.

We call upon Israel to deal seriously and positively with international efforts aimed at issuing the road map. That calls for Israel's acceptance of the road map, once issued, and Israel's active participation in its implementation, according to a specific timetable set for every stage of its implementation.

On this note, I wish to stress the true and serious Arab commitment to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, as presented in the Arab Peace Initiative adopted collectively during the Beirut Summit. The initiative was clear and balanced, without a doubt. All Arab States will collectively sign a peace treaty with Israel in return for the following: first, Israel's full and prior withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories up to the lines of 4 June 1967; secondly the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital; thirdly, reaching an agreed and just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions. This initiative is also in agreement with the vision and commitment expressed by United States President George Bush, and with what the final status agreement on the Palestinian-Israeli track should look like.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my Government's position regarding the Palestinian refugees hosted by Jordan, numbering about 1.7 million and registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Jordan has suffered economic and financial burdens for over 50 years by hosting these refugees and displaced persons, which has depleted Jordan's developmental and environmental resources to a great extent — greater than any of the countries that host or donate to refugees.

The Government of Jordan has spent approximately $403 million in 2002 on educational services, health, infrastructure and social welfare for the Palestinian refugees. Currently, the Government is working on improving living conditions in the 13 camps for Palestinian refugees in the Kingdom. It also covers any additional costs resulting from UNRWA's inability to fulfil all of its services at any point due to budgetary constraints. Thus, I wish to stress that UNRWA should continue to operate in the region until a final agreement on the Palestinian refugee problem is reached and its various aspects are completely settled. I also wish to express my Government's gratitude and appreciation to all donor States who continue to support UNRWA's budget.

The continuous Israeli settlement activity is obstructing international efforts to put the peace process back on track and is undermining efforts aimed at achieving progress in terms of cooperation between the Palestinians and the Israelis and the rebuilding of trust and confidence. Furthermore, Israeli settlement policies are a flagrant violation of international law and are contradictory to the principle of land for peace. We thus call upon Israel to freeze all settlement activity in the Palestinian occupied territories, including Jerusalem, and to put an end to the aggressive and provocative actions carried out by Israeli settlers against defenceless Palestinians.

As for East Jerusalem, it is an occupied Arab territory. It has been occupied since 1967 and is subject to the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 478 (1980), which rejects all Israeli measures aimed at altering the demographic nature and legal status of the city. Accordingly, we wish to re-emphasize that Israel and any body — governmental or non-governmental — must fully adhere to and comply with these resolutions. Jerusalem is of great spiritual and religious value to the followers of the three monotheistic faiths and should always remain a city open to all and a symbol of peace in the Middle East.

We in Jordan find ourselves caught in a cycle of escalating violence that is holding back economic and social progress in the region, both because of the crisis we are witnessing on our western borders with the Palestinian territories and Israel, and because of the economic sanctions imposed on the people of Iraq on our eastern borders. These difficult conditions threaten the stability of the region in terms of both security and the economy.

We look forward to the day when the peoples of the region will live in peace, stability and security, far

from the killing and violence, far from occupation, poverty, frustration and desperation.

Mr. Cappagli (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): In the last year, the situation in the Middle East has continued to deteriorate dramatically. As a result of the spiral of violence, vengeance and reprisal that began in September 2000, almost 2,000 Palestinians and more than 600 Israelis have been killed, and thousands more from both communities injured.

As a consequence of terrorist acts, killings of innocent civilians, reoccupation of Palestinian territories, settlement activities, extrajudicial killings, humiliating treatment of civilians, closures and curfews and the destruction of economic infrastructure and homes, the resentment and tension between Israelis and Palestinians have reached alarming levels.

The parties directly involved in this conflict do not seem to realize that this conflict does not and will never have a military solution or, much less, a solution imposed by terrorism. We regret that, in spite of the repeated calls of the international community, the vicious circle of confrontation leading nowhere continues unabated, without end.

Two reports issued recently by important non-governmental human-rights organizations contain disturbing findings and conclusions. In one report, Amnesty International describes some of the acts of the Israeli forces in the Jenin refugee camp and in the city of Nablus in the context of the Operation Defensive Shield and concludes that they meet the definition of war crimes and crimes against humanity. On the other hand, Human Rights Watch asserts that suicide bombings perpetrated by Palestinian groups against Israeli civilians are also war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Under international law, Israel and the Palestinian Authority have clear security, humanitarian and human-rights obligations. The aforementioned reports and the relevant documents published by the United Nations clearly demonstrate that both sides have violated these obligations.

Israel should abide by the provisions of humanitarian international law, in particular those of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which provides for protection against wilful killings, torture, humiliating or degrading treatment, deportations, acts of collective punishment or reprisals and appropriation or destruction of property. All violations of these provisions should cease immediately.

Argentina believes that Israel has the right to live in security, to protect itself and to bring to justice the perpetrators of terrorist attacks. However, those rights should be pursued in conformity with law. As the Secretary-General said, self-defence is not a blank cheque, and responding to terrorism in no way exonerates Israel from its obligations.

Likewise, Israel must take immediate action to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories by implementing the recommendations of the Bertini report.

The Palestinian Authority, for its part, is obliged to refrain from carrying out attacks against Israeli civilians and has the responsibility of protecting those civilians from terrorist bombing attacks originating in areas under its security control. It has been demonstrated that terrorism has not vanquished Israel. Rather, it has increased the determination of the Israeli Government to eradicate terrorism.

The Argentine Republic reiterates its strenuous condemnation of terrorist attacks against innocent civilians. We join others in condemning the recent attacks carried out in Kenya and in the Israeli city of Beit She'an. My country has also suffered the scourge of terrorism. In the 1990s, there were two bombing attacks in our country, one against the Embassy of Israel and the other against AMIA, a Jewish benefit society, in which more than 100 people were killed or injured. In addition, Argentine citizens residing in Israel have been killed in two bombing attacks perpetrated this year in that country. We would like to express our heartfelt condolences to the families of all victims of those attacks, and we strenuously call for an end to such attacks.

Argentina deplores the death on 22 November 2002 of Mr. Iain Hook, an employee of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The unfortunate incident can be added to the list of other such incidents occurring in the occupied territories in the past year that affected United Nations workers.

Under international humanitarian law, there is an obligation to ensure the security and protection of all humanitarian personnel and United Nations and

associated personnel. There is no justification for the violation of those basic norms. Through various initiatives, Argentina has repeatedly expressed its concern for the security of personnel. In February 2000, when presiding over the Security Council, my country convened an open debate, chaired by the Argentine Minister for Foreign Affairs, which concluded with the adoption of the presidential statement of 9 February 2000.

The tragic events I have just described indicate the urgent need for the parties to resume a process leading back to the negotiating table. Argentina strongly supports the initiatives of the Quartet to that end and agrees that progress should be made simultaneously in the political, economic, humanitarian and security tracks. To make progress on only one aspect without addressing the others would not contribute to the stability of the region and would undermine chances of creating a climate of mutual trust.

In that context, my country believes that the road map prepared by the Quartet can provide the basis for the resumption of a peace process that would lead to the realization of the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians to their real independence and personal dignity, including the establishment of an independent and democratic State, and to the legitimate right of Israel to recognition and security. We call on the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to work actively with the Quartet to implement that plan.

The only option in the Middle East is peace — a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement in the Middle East, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), the Madrid terms of reference, in particular the principle of land for peace, and other existing agreements between the parties. To this end, progress should be made in all tracks of the peace process so as to realize the aspiration of achieving peace, not only between Israel and the Palestinian Authority but also between Israel and Lebanon and between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic.

In southern Lebanon, the conduct of the parties should be guided by the full implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). In the current circumstances, the utmost restraint and self-control should be exercised, while respecting the Blue Line established by the United Nations and refraining from carrying out or tolerating acts of provocation that can increase tension along the Blue Line. In accordance with the request of the Security Council, the Lebanese Government should continue to consolidate its authority in the southern part of the country, and Israel should respect the territorial integrity of Lebanon.

With respect to the Golan Heights, my country would like to reiterate once again that the acquisition of territory by force is unacceptable. Resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) set out the path that the parties should follow: the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the Syrian Golan occupied in 1967 and respect for, and acknowledgement of, the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of all States in the area and of their right to live in peace within secure and unthreatened borders. We call upon Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic to negotiate in good faith on the basis of the aforementioned resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

Argentina calls on the parties, with the assistance of the Quartet and other countries of the international community, to abandon the logic of confrontation and to embark on the path of compromise and mutual concessions in order to realize the much desired aspiration that all peoples in the Middle East should live side by side in harmony and peace.

Mr. Neil (Jamaica): The annual debate on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine is an occasion that reminds us of the historic responsibility of the United Nations with regard to these questions, which over the years have had such a painful history. The past year has been one particularly full of violence and tragedy. The pattern of attack and retaliation in a continuous cycle of reprisals has become so frequent and familiar in recent times that there is danger of the acceptance of violent conflict as the norm and as an inevitable feature of the Middle East situation. What is also worrisome is the posture of detachment and inaction on the part of the world community. That cannot be good for the image of the United Nations with respect to the fulfilment of its responsibilities concerning an issue of great importance for world peace.

Mr. Kpotsra (Togo), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The current breakdown in the peace process and the re-emergence of confrontational attitudes and policies are part of the scene of a continuing human

tragedy of bloodshed and destruction. A climate of distrust and mutual hostility is generating more and more violence, which is taking a heavy toll on the lives of both Palestinian and Israeli civilians. Most distressing of all is the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the area: the shootings and military excesses of the Israeli occupation forces, the destruction of homes and property, the economic deprivation, the misery and the impoverishment, which are all part of this continuing pattern of deterioration. Those distressing conditions are the results of hard-line policies that emphasize military solutions, which only help to provoke further conflict. The shift towards confrontation is disheartening with regard to the prospects for dialogue and negotiations, and it is now more essential than ever that the international community persevere in its efforts to revive the peace process.

Jamaica claims no special expertise in dissecting the complex issues in the Middle East situation, nor are we in a position to exercise any significant leverage on the parties. We simply want to join the moderate voices calling for peace. We do so out of concern for the victims of a continuing human tragedy and out of a sense of duty as a Member of the United Nations body that has a collective responsibility to fulfil. We do not in any way underestimate the difficulty or the complexity of the issues, but Jamaica continues to believe that peace is possible and necessary and that it requires perseverance and continuous active efforts. It is clear to us that, while it is up to the parties to shoulder the responsibility to make peace, it is not realistic to leave it only up to them to take the initiative. They are not able to do it by themselves. It requires intervention and mediation from the international community to exert influence on the parties and to provide the proper framework and the mechanisms for peace negotiations.

What is needed now is a greater sense of urgency, more active efforts by sponsors of the peace process from all sides and, especially, a more active role on the part of the United Nations itself. The Security Council should be doing more. In the face of the grave situation and its continuing deterioration, there is a need for more active consideration of the issue and for greater urgency in the promotion of diplomatic initiatives. The United Nations has a central role to play, and the Security Council — as the organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security — has that special responsibility under the Charter. We need to see that responsibility being discharged in implementing the principles of resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) through the sponsorship of a peace conference, which needs to be actively pursued.

So much has happened, and so much time has been lost, but the world community should not abandon what has been started. A decade ago at the Madrid Conference, the peace process began with the acceptance of the principle of land for peace, incorporated into the ensuing Oslo Accords. Jamaica shared the optimism of the international community that we had embarked on a process that was leading to a final settlement. Regrettably, that process was stalled in the unfolding political changes in the Middle East, and some momentum was lost.

However, our view is that the process that has been started should not be discarded and that it is still a basis on which peace can be built. A number of initiatives and proposals are available that contain the basic guidelines on which peace can be negotiated. The Oslo Accords, the principles of the Tenet ceasefire plan, the Mitchell report recommendations and the Saudi Arabian peace plan adopted by the League of Arab States provide the principles and a substantive basis for a negotiated settlement of the issues. What is needed now is a political initiative from within the international community to move the process forward and to bring the parties to negotiations without preconditions.

Jamaica continues to believe that settlement of the question of Palestine is a critical issue. It is now widely accepted that the right of Palestinians to live in dignity in an independent State in Palestine must be an indispensable part of any settlement. Peace must have justice, and justice demands that the Palestinians be accorded the rights to which they are entitled and the right to an end to the haunting tragedy of indignity and deprivation.

Secondly, it is time for the occupation to end, along with the illegal establishment of settlements in the occupied territories. The prolonged occupation by Israel has intensified grievances and has provoked anger, bitterness, frustration and despair. If the Palestinian people are not offered any hope, and if their elected leaders are subjected to disrespect and

humiliation, there can be no real prospect for a durable peace.

Finally, there should be an acknowledgement of the right of all States in the area to exist in peace and security within recognized boundaries. That includes the acceptance of the State of Israel's right to security as a State in the region and to safety for its citizens. It goes without saying that Israel should also respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbours, in accordance with the principles of international law. The only route to achieving those objectives is through peaceful negotiations. Violence cannot bring justice for the Palestinians, nor can military domination and subjugation of the Palestinian people bring security for Israel. Those are the lessons learned from the past decades of conflict.

Jamaica's call is, therefore, for peace negotiations. War and military force are not the answer. We condemn violence of all kinds against civilians, whether they are Israelis or Palestinians. Suicide bombings must be rejected. Equally, all attempts to impose a military solution through military subjugation and suppression of the Palestinian people should be rejected. The only way forward is through compromise and an accommodation between the Israelis and Palestinians based on the peace process begun in Madrid. Until that goal is reached, there is a need for restraint and for a cessation of further acts of violence on both sides.

In that context, it is important that all operations in the occupied territories be conducted within the framework of international legality, especially those provided for in the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Every possible influence should be exerted to avoid the drift towards extremist positions, which promote confrontation and armed conflict. What we need now is support for moderation, the reduction of tension and the encouragement of compromise and mutual accommodation from both Israel and the Palestinians. Coexistence is the only way. That is the lesson that history has taught us.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): This year, the General Assembly is debating the two items on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine amid very telling and critical regional and international reports that the region is enduring a horrific escalation of Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and their infrastructure.

The Madrid peace process was launched 11 years ago. Year after year — indeed, month by month and day by day — it is losing momentum. It is clear to all those devoted to peace within and beyond our region that Israel's continuing occupation of Arab lands, which it sometimes justifies under the pretext of its security needs and sometimes by various false claims, is the main obstacle on the path to peace. The peace process has been halted on all tracks, particularly in recent years following the accession to power of extremist Governments in Israel. These Governments have prepared their country, in theory and in practice, for the prevailing conditions on the ground. They insist on occupying Arab land and on rejecting international legality. They refuse to implement relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and reject the principle of land for peace.

Syria's serious negotiations over the years have unmasked Israel's intentions. Israel is not serious about achieving a just and comprehensive peace based on relevant Security Council resolutions. Furthermore, it is Syria's inalienable right to regain, without barter, all of the occupied Golan Heights to the line of 4 June 1967. That right has been reaffirmed in all relevant United Nations resolutions.

Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights was accompanied by the promulgation of legislation, measures and other ways and means to empty the land of its people, to establish all necessary conditions for the building of settlements on occupied Arab lands and to bring in settlers from all parts of the world to replace the Arab inhabitants. This is a violation of all international instruments and resolutions. Israel has demolished urban centres and appropriated, expropriated or destroyed the water, agricultural and livestock resources of the Syrian Arab inhabitants of the Golan. Furthermore, it has contributed to the deterioration of the environment by uprooting trees and disposing of chemical wastes in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan.

Among the most important consequences of occupation is the issue of the approximately 500,000 displaced Syrians ejected by Israel from the occupied Golan in 1967. These people are still waiting to return to their lands and to their homes, and yet the number of Israeli settlers in the Golan is growing. The Israeli occupation authorities continue to expand settlements,

which now number about 40, in flagrant violation of Security Council resolution 497 (1981).

These policies and actions have evoked astonishment, denunciation and strong condemnation. Israel's leaders are well aware that occupation, oppression and injustice cannot prevail and continue. They know that the Golan is an indivisible part of Syria and that it will return to the motherland, however long it may take and regardless of the military might of the occupying Power. They know above all that the Israeli policy of occupation is the only such policy being implemented in contemporary political reality.

Last year saw ever more barbaric acts being committed against the defenceless Palestinian people. The occupying forces have a record of considerable criminal activity that has led to the deaths of 2,000 martyrs and the injury of thousands upon thousands of Palestinians since the beginning of the intifada. Israeli activities in the towns and villages of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are quite simply ugly massacres, in the full meaning of the word. They are crimes of genocide. Palestinian children, women and elderly are being killed by Israeli military aircraft, tanks and rockets, as affirmed in paragraph 5 of the Economic and Social Council's report in document A/57/63.

In this regard, I note that the report issued a few days ago by Amnesty International affirmed that Israeli activities in the reoccupation of the West Bank and the incursions in Jenin and Nablus are war crimes. Furthermore, paragraphs 22, 23 and 24 of the report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of 24 April 2002 refer to the use by the Israel Defence Forces of Palestinian civilians as human shields. In this vein, I would also cite the statement made by Paul Grossrieder, Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, to the effect that the Israeli army has used no fewer than eight Red Crescent medical staff members as human shields. It is also worth noting that Mr. Peter Hansen, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in a press statement released by the United Nations Information Service on 5 April 2002, stated that there had been

> "entry into homes, house after house, destruction of what is in the houses, often destruction of the houses ... The situation [in the camps] is really unprecedented ... It is quite appalling to see... how some installations, for instance in the health and medical area, have been destroyed and medicines smashed".

Israeli practices have even included threats against the lives and freedom of movement of United Nations personnel, many of whom have been killed. The latest casualty is the British national Iain John Hook, the senior manager of UNRWA's Jenin camp reconstruction project. A large part of that camp has been burned to the ground under repeated Israeli assaults.

Israel has exploited in the ugliest possible way the umbrella of the international coalition against terrorism, terrorism that we all deplore, in the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001. It is combating the just Palestinian cause on the pretext of fighting terrorism. Israel continues to attempt to eradicate resistance to occupation. Palestinian resistance is self-defence — defence of land and dignity — but Israel classifies it as terrorism. By so doing, Israel contravenes international instruments, moral values and the principles of international law. Israel is attempting to cover up its war of extermination against the Palestinian people.

Israeli contempt for international legitimacy deserves the denunciation and anger of international public opinion, particularly after the Israeli Government refused to accept a fact-finding mission to investigate the massacre perpetrated in the Jenin camp for Palestinian refugees. It claims that its crimes against the Palestinian people are self-defence, a war against terrorism. At the same time, Israel resorts to the ugliest forms of terrorism on the pretext of fighting terrorism. For many years, Syria has called on the international community to condemn all forms of terrorism, particularly State terrorism, as practiced by Israel in its highest form.

The phenomenon of terrorism was unknown in our region until the creation of Israel in 1948. Since then, Israel has become deft at practicing terrorism to entrench its occupation of Arab lands and to commit massacres with impunity. To rid themselves of despair and frustration the Palestinian people now have no alternative to the intifada to free their land and regain their dignity. The criminal war waged by Israel against the Palestinian people is not self-defence, as Israel portrays it to the world, but rather a war waged to defend and perpetuate occupation, to manufacture and

distort facts and tug on the heartstrings of some States in an attempt to legitimize occupation, in contravention of the Charter of the United Nations, the principles of international law and resolutions of international legality.

Peace contradicts occupation. Peace cannot be reconciled with the brutal force used by Israel. Since the end of the Second World War and until today, our region has witnessed a series of wars and acts of destruction because of an Israeli pattern of behaviour based on occupation, settlement and the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of Arabs and Palestinians from their homes and their homeland. The United Nations has made many efforts to reach a just settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Hundreds of resolutions have been adopted in that regard, but Israel has refused to implement them, flagrantly defying the will of the international community. It has perpetuated its occupation of the Golan, the West Bank, Gaza and parts of Lebanese territory. No measure has been taken under Chapter VII of the Charter against that occupying Power. The Arab States unanimously adopted a peace initiative at the Beirut Summit of the League of Arab States last March that paves the way for comprehensive peace. This is an initiative born of the region; it takes into account the comprehensive nature of peace. However, Israel responded to that peace initiative by killing it, through incursions into Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps in the West Bank. And today, as we speak, there are incursions into Gaza.

Israel also defies all of the international community's efforts towards a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The international community must realize that peace cannot be made at the expense of continued occupation of the lands of peoples and of a continued policy of killing, destruction, starving and crowding Palestinians in detention camps. This leads to the question of how the security that Israel wants can be obtained with all these continuing factors in the occupied territories. How can security be obtained in the absence of a just and comprehensive peace in the region?

The road to peace is now crystal clear to all in the Middle East — indeed, to all in the world. The implementation of the relevant resolutions of international legality, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace are the instrument. The peace initiative of the Beirut Summit is the most viable and appropriate path for the region because it is of the region. The implementation of that comprehensive initiative would achieve peace and security in the region.

The international community assembled here at the United Nations must bring all kinds of pressure to bear to ensure the implementation of the will of the United Nations and international legality without selectivity or double standards. It is impossible for us to understand why Chapter VII of the Charter is selectively invoked against many States that violate international legality and that violate the Charter in various crises while it is not applied to Israel, which has shown contempt for all relevant United Nations resolutions and resolutions of international legality. Does this not damage the credibility of United Nations resolutions?

In conclusion, allow me to appeal to the representatives of States Members of the United Nations to vote in favour of the draft resolutions before them under agenda items 35, "Question of Palestine", and 36, "The situation in the Middle East". Those draft resolutions are a call to the international conscience to bring pressure to bear on Israel to abide by the resolutions of international legality. A vote for the draft resolutions is a contribution to just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East region. It is also a contribution to combating State terrorism and the Israeli policy of occupation and to forcing Israel to cease that occupation.

Mr. Maquieira (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Since we have been meeting in this Hall to consider this item, we have witnessed an unprecedented spiral of violence and aggression in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel. The violence has taken an irreparable toll on innocent human lives, mainly civilians on both sides, many of them children, women and elderly people.

We note with concern that the efforts of the international community to renew security cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians have thus far not borne fruit. Because of its direct effects, we regret Israel's lack of cooperation in implementing General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on this item. That diminishes the credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations and weakens its role under the Charter as the guarantor of international peace and

security. It also affects the national dignity of all Members of the Organization. Along with the ongoing terrorist violence in Israeli territory, that has brought the peace process in the Middle East, a process that Chile has supported since it began in Madrid and Oslo, to a standstill.

The deterioration of the situation in the Israeli-occupied territories and the increased restrictions against the Palestinian civilian population have had a negative impact on the economy and the humanitarian situation of that population, who are the main victims of the conflict. Israel, for its part, is experiencing its worst economic recession since 1953. Consequently, and in view of that tragic reality, we are dismayed at those on both sides who insist on diminishing the opportunities for a political solution, pronouncing the Oslo accords dead.

The struggle for human dignity to prevail over abuse and violations is based on unconditional respect for the basic principle of the inviolability of life, the acceptance of different opinions, mutual respect and the correct use of words. Words can promote peace or instigate violence and instability. We, therefore, cannot ignore the echo of other decisive voices: the voices of those who can see beyond the limitations of the present and have succeeded in scaling the wall that has separated Palestinians and Israelis from a peace process that was and remains real and that should continue along the same path. We, therefore, make a clear and explicit appeal to the parties involved in the conflict to cease all acts of violence and to return without delay to negotiations in the context of the peace process that the international community has offered for that purpose.

My country recognizes the right of Israel to live within secure borders, protected from acts of terror. We reject the Palestinian suicide attacks, whose bombs have inflicted deep wounds on Israeli society. Those acts, and any other criminal terrorist acts, are morally unacceptable. Nevertheless, the right to which Israel is entitled must be exercised in accordance with international law. The excessive or disproportionate use of force and the attendant violations of human rights and humanitarian law are not justifiable. Israel must safeguard the security of its citizens without violating the rights of Palestinians.

My country rejects particularly the extrajudicial killings, the military attacks, the use of particularly destructive weapons in areas with dense concentrations of civilians, arbitrary or extended detentions, forced deportations and collective punishment. Such acts leave consequences that are difficult to repair and, worse still, engender hate of the occupier.

In that context, and in keeping with our support for the Mitchell report and with our repeated appeals for an unconditional end to violence, Chile is concerned by the Israeli Government's persistence in maintaining its policy of building new settlements, whose existence suffocates and humiliates the Palestinian population. The settlements and the roads that separate Palestinian communities and deprive them of farmland have fragmented both the land and the population and have set the peace process back.

My country supports the efforts of the Quartet and endorses its proposal for a three-pronged approach to dealing comprehensively with economic, political and security concerns. We urge it to continue to steer the process in the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution negotiated between the parties and based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) and on the core principle of land for peace.

We look forward to the prompt resumption of peace talks between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, under the umbrella of international legitimacy and in keeping with commitments made.

Chile will spare no effort to assist the international community to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The challenges are enormous. Peace is not only the absence of war; it is the readiness to establish conditions that are characterized by equity and justice.

Achieving that objective inevitably requires a definitive solution to the Palestinian problem, the cornerstone of the conflict in the region. Violence is unacceptable, and the occupation must end and give way to peaceful coexistence between two independent States, two peoples living side by side within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Kulyk (Ukraine): The situation in the Middle East continues to be a source of deep concern for Ukraine. For yet another year the parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have not been able to break the vicious circle of violence and terror that contradicts the

true aspirations of both peoples and that every day brings more death and destruction and breeds more hatred and desperation. Of particular concern are the increasing human suffering and loss of life among innocent Palestinian and Israeli civilian populations, as well as the deteriorating humanitarian crisis faced by the Palestinians.

On many occasions, Ukraine has stated its condemnation and utter rejection of terrorism. Such despicable acts must be fought with the greatest determination. We call on the Palestinian Authority to take all measures within its power to prevent terrorist attacks against Israelis, including suicide bombings, and to bring those responsible to justice. Terrorist activities contravene and further complicate the fulfilment of the legitimate aspiration to a Palestinian State.

The legitimate right of Israel to defend its citizens from acts of terror cannot justify the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force and extrajudicial killings that often include innocent Palestinian civilians among their victims and the excessive destruction of private and public property, including institutions of the Palestinian Authority. Adequate security for Israel and its people cannot be ensured solely with military force. We call on Israel to withdraw its forces to the positions held prior to September 2000, to lift the blockade of the territories, to stop the collective punishment of the Palestinian population and to halt settlement activities. Immediate efforts should also be made by the international community to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, as well as towards the resumption of normal daily activity in the occupied Palestinian territories.

It is obvious that there is no military solution to the conflict. It is only through peaceful dialogue and a political process between the parties that a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be found. Therefore, we urge the parties for the sake of their peoples to cease all acts of violence against each other and to commence negotiations on the establishment of the Palestinian State, including on an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territories and on finding solutions to the issues of borders, the status of the Holy City of Jerusalem and refugees.

The basis of negotiations is well known and widely accepted by the international community. It is Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace, and the previously signed agreements. The final goal of the negotiations is also clear. It is the realization of the vision of two States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side in peace and within secure and internationally recognized borders.

In that context, we fully support the ongoing efforts of the Quartet, the countries of the region and other important international players aimed at finalizing a phased road map to bring this vision to fruition in three years. Considering the current circumstances of the conflict and in the region, the international community, with the United Nations at the forefront, should neither relax its attention nor weaken its efforts to advance the peace process. We look forward with hope to the forthcoming meeting of the Quartet, when the road map is expected to be agreed, and we call on both parties to respond positively to that plan. We fully understand that accepting this road will require painful compromises and hard decisions by their leaders. But we also do recognize that the alternative would be continued bloodshed and even further delay in the prospects for a peaceful solution.

Ukraine stands ready to continue to assist the parties to achieve peace. In that context, let me recall the Ukrainian proposals in the framework of international diplomatic efforts aimed at a peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict (*see A/57/69, annex*), put forward by the President of Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma, last April, and which envisage a range of parallel steps in political, security and economic spheres. It is to be noted that Ukraine's suggestion that it could provide a venue and the necessary conditions on its territory for holding peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians remains valid.

I am also glad to confirm the readiness of Ukraine to host, next year in Kiev, a United Nations international meeting in support of Middle East peace. Such a meeting would help to promote international support for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and for the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

A comprehensive Middle East settlement will be impossible without the resumption of peace negotiations on the Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian

tracks aimed at ending the occupation of Arab territories and at normalization of relations with Israel. In this regard, we recall the importance of the Arab peace initiative adopted last March at the Arab League Summit in Beirut. We encourage the Lebanese and Israeli parties to engage in dialogue on all issues outstanding following the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) and the establishment of the Blue Line. We also call on all the parties concerned to exercise the utmost restraint, to refrain from any acts of violence or provocation and to ensure full respect for the Blue Line. A diplomatic resolution of the dispute over the Wazzani springs water project should also be found in order to reduce the level of tension.

Ukraine contributes an engineering battalion to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL); it is performing de-mining in South Lebanon and helps in this way to return normal life to the area. My country stands ready to expand its contribution to these efforts by engaging its industrial and technological potential in the rebuilding and reconstruction of this country.

I would like to express the hope that, through the joint efforts of the parties concerned and the international community, the Middle East will become a region all of whose peoples live in the peace, security, prosperity and dignity to which they aspire, and which they deserve.

Mr. Ivanou (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): We note with regret that the Middle East peace process is still beset by the serious consequences of the events of 28 September 2000 in East Jerusalem. Acts of violence continue unabated in the region; innocent civilians continue to die; and the socio-economic infrastructure continues to be destroyed.

Sliding further down this vicious slope of violence could forever deprive current and future generations of Arabs and Israelis of the chance to live peacefully and to work together in their ancestral land. The only solution to this tragic situation is through the embodiment of deeds of the political will of both parties to achieve peace and concord for the sake of the thousands of lives sacrificed in the half-century-old confrontation.

The Republic of Belarus is pained at the continuing bloodshed that, again and again, prevents normalization of the situation in the Middle East. Like all members of the world community, Belarus is determined to do everything it can to bring about a speedy settlement of the conflict. We decisively reject all forms of armed violence and terrorism in the region, and we would like once again to proclaim our unchanging commitment to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on mutual recognition by the independent States of Palestine and Israel and on the principle of land for peace.

Peace in the Middle East will be impossible unless the Palestinian people exercise their historic right to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State of Palestine. Peace is also impossible without peaceful coexistence of Palestinian and Israeli States within secure and internationally recognized borders.

That understanding served as the basis of the plan of the Quartet, which undertook the difficult and vitally important role of collective mediator in reconciling the parties. That was the vision reflected in the initiative adopted at the Beirut Summit in March 2002. We sincerely hope that the coordinated efforts and initiatives of the international community will ultimately lead to a resumption of the peace process in order to attain a final political settlement.

The prospects for stabilization of the situation in the Middle East are now truly threatened by developments surrounding Iraq. The President and the Government of Belarus are convinced that the artificial heightening of tension and the use of force-based scenarios in seeking to resolve the Iraqi question will have catastrophic consequences for the whole region. We have no right to allow a new war to occur in the Middle East. It would undo the many years of peace efforts undertaken by interested parties.

In that connection, Belarus once again proclaims its commitment to the abiding responsibility of the United Nations, and primarily that of the Security Council, for the peaceful settlement of the Iraqi and Arab-Israeli crises in all of their aspects.

In conclusion, we wish to emphasize once again our conviction that attaining a political settlement in the Middle East is indispensable to guarantee a peaceful future for the cradle of three world religions.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker on my list for the discussion of item 36.

I regret to announce that I will be obliged to adjourn the meeting well before 6 p.m. due to the lack of speakers ready to speak at this meeting. I would remind representatives that consideration of this item had been planned for weeks; therefore, distinguished delegates had plenty of time to prepare their statements.

I still have 13 speakers on my list for tomorrow morning to continue this discussion. We will continue tomorrow, Tuesday, at 10 a.m.

Programme of Work

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I would like to make an announcement regarding the programme of the work of the plenary of the General Assembly. On Wednesday, 11 December 2002, in the morning, the General Assembly will consider agenda item 19 on the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, as well as the report of the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.

United Nations A/57/PV.66

General Assembly

Fifty-seventh session

Official Records

66th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 3 December 2002, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kavan ..... (Czech Republic)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga (Ecuador), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 36 (*continued*)

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/57/470, A/57/621)

Draft resolutions (A/57/L.44, A/57/L.45)

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): It is a matter of profound regret and concern to my delegation that, after 32 years of its consideration by this Assembly, this item — "The situation in the Middle East" — continues to be debated without a solution in sight. The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories remains volatile, with the violence threatening to spiral out of control. The outcomes of the conflict have been devastating, with death and destruction affecting both peoples, particularly the Palestinians. The toll in terms of casualties has been staggeringly high and well documented. What is worse is the deepening chasm of mistrust and antipathy between Palestinians and Israelis at all levels during the current intifada, which, if not bridged as soon as possible, threatens to erupt into a full-scale conflict between the two sides, with grave repercussions for regional peace and security.

The highly unstable situation in the region is aggravated by the current preoccupation with Iraq and the preparations in some quarters for military action against that country, which will open a new and dangerous dimension in an already complex and complicated situation in the Middle East.

At the core of this regional tension remains the continued occupation by Israel of Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif or East Jerusalem. We are all too familiar with the details of the conflict, of the violence and hostilities it has generated over the decades and of its impact on Palestinians and Israelis alike. The consequences for the Palestinians have been particularly debilitating and tragic. They involve the blatant and persistent violation of their human rights, characterized by arbitrary arrests and detentions, ill treatment and torture of prisoners, exile or banishment, extrajudicial killings of targeted individuals, economic and social deprivations, the demolition of houses, seizures, blockades and curfews, the destruction of farmlands and infrastructures, severe restrictions of water use and other forms of unjustified collective punishment.

The extent of the inhumane treatment of Palestinians living under the occupation has been well documented in United Nations and other independent reports and recounted by the Palestinian delegation and other concerned delegations in this Assembly and the Security Council. The net effect of Israeli occupation policies and practices has been one of tremendous political, economic and social suffering and hardship

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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for the population, including the loss of human lives. The tragedy is that these details of the dire plight of the Palestinian people living under occupation have been recounted so many times in this Assembly, the Security Council and elsewhere that they have ceased to shock us. They have become a routine feature of life under occupation. Unfortunately for the victims, they will continue to bear the burden of the harsh treatment meted out against them without any hope of early redress.

In the meantime, President Yasser Arafat, their democratically leader, continues to be demonized, harassed and intimidated at every turn and accused of being ineffective and ineffectual when every facet of his authority has been systematically undermined. Subjected to all forms of humiliation, he remains a virtual prisoner in his own country, unable to travel abroad out of fear of being permanently barred from returning home. The peace process is in tatters and the spirit of Oslo and Madrid, which had given so much hope for the future, is practically dead among many Israelis.

The current deplorable situation and the oppression of the Palestinians cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely. It must be brought to an immediate end lest the situation spiral out of control, with grave repercussions on regional and international peace and security. Malaysia continues to believe in the urgent need for an interposing United Nations or international force, an idea that enjoys wide support, including from the Secretary-General. Only such a presence would be able to calm the situation and help rebuild the confidence and trust that have been so badly shattered during these past two years of violence. At the political/diplomatic level, every encouragement and support must be given to the efforts of the Quartet, as well as to the Arab peace initiative adopted in Beirut in March this year. We would urge the parties involved to press on with their extremely challenging tasks.

We look forward to the finalization of the road map so that a comprehensive settlement can be achieved and the two-State goal set forth by Security Council resolution 1397 (2002) realized.

Malaysia is equally concerned about the situation of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan. We deplore the fact that the Arabs of the Syrian Golan continue to suffer under the occupation. Like their Palestinian brethren, they experience many deprivations, such as work restrictions, limited access to education, and many other forms of humiliation and indignities that characterize life under occupation. We consider the existence — indeed, the further expansion — of Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan as a gross violation of article 49 (6) of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which categorically prohibits an occupying Power from transferring parts of its own population into the territory it occupies.

The settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan remain a major obstacle to the resumption of the Syrian-Israeli peace process, which has been suspended since 1996. We urge Israel to demonstrate the sincerity of its professed desire for peace by taking concrete and serious steps to comply with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which call for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories occupied in 1967. The stalemate and the lack of dialogue between the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel aimed at implementing those resolutions, based on the principle of land for peace, are a cause for serious concern and constitute an additional negative element in the already volatile Middle East situation. The repeated renewals of the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) for 28 years is indicative of the tense environment between the two sides.

With regard to Lebanon, while there has been some progress in the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) following Israeli's withdrawal from south Lebanon on 16 June 2000, we believe that the situation in the area remains volatile and is closely linked with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Breaches of the Blue Line raise the possibility of a full-scale conflict along the frontier that could easily flare up into a serious confrontation, drawing in several parties. Repeated Israeli violations of the Blue Line and of Lebanese airspace, which are met with retaliatory anti-aircraft fire from the Lebanese side, pose serious risks of a further deterioration of the situation. It is imperative that Israel fully respect the Blue Line and refrain from further violations.

In his briefing to the Security Council on 12 November, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs drew attention to the fact that the Wazzani Springs water project was also a source of tension along the Blue Line and that diplomatic efforts were being undertaken to defuse the tension. We welcome such efforts and hope that a diplomatic resolution of the matter can be achieved. Similarly, we encourage

the parties to resolve outstanding issues following the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) and the establishment of the Blue Line through constructive dialogue. We welcome the full reinstatement of the effective authority of the Lebanese Government in south Lebanon, which will contribute to further progress in the discharge of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

Given the unsettled and precarious situation in the Middle East, my delegation is particularly concerned at the widely reported preparations for war against Iraq, even as the weapons inspectors are resuming their work, and given that Mr. Hans Blix, the head of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), has yet to submit his findings to the Security Council, which, by virtue of resolution 1441 (2002), is the final authority in terms of deciding on the appropriate next steps to deal with any development arising out of the inspection.

Prejudging the report to be submitted by UNMOVIC would seriously undermine the authority and credibility of the Security Council and of the United Nations as a whole. We believe that the international community must quickly address the current precarious and potentially explosive situation in the region and undertake every effort to de-escalate tension by focusing on efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and allowing UNMOVIC to carry out its mandate under resolution 1441 (2002), rather than making preparations for war against Iraq. Such a war would have serious implications for the international situation, particularly as concerns global efforts to combat terrorism, which would be seriously impaired. It would widen the gap and deepen the differences between the Muslim world and the West and could swell the ranks of the discontented in the Muslim world, especially when the oppression of the Palestinian people continues to be ignored by the international community. It would give extremist elements powerful ammunition and a convenient excuse to mobilize support for their militant cause. It would indeed be tragic for the region if the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, one of the most intractable conflicts in the world, were to be sidelined in pursuit of some short-term political objectives vis-à-vis Iraq.

Given the unsettled situation in the Middle East, my delegation remains committed to encouraging peaceful solutions to the multifaceted and complex problems faced by the region. We urge the parties concerned to seek a just and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict based on all relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 1397 (2002); the Madrid terms of reference; the principle of land for peace; and the implementation of all existing agreements between the parties towards a comprehensive peace in the Middle East on all tracks, including the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks. We urge Israel, in its own best interests, to look beyond its immediate security needs — important though they are — and to begin in earnest to engage its Arab neighbours in serious and meaningful dialogues towards the early realization of such a comprehensive peace.

Mr. Nambiar (India): It has been over 11 years since the Middle East peace process began in Madrid. The peace process envisioned direct negotiations between Israel and the Arab States on the one hand and between Israel and the Palestinians on the other, to be conducted on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), based on the principle of land for peace.

A number of positive developments have followed. These include the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, under the leadership of President Arafat; diplomatic relations between Israel and several others, including some Arab countries; and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon.

Unfortunately, however, the last two years have represented, in large measure, a negation of the progress achieved since Madrid. In every sense, the region has witnessed regression from the modest success that had been achieved painstakingly over almost a decade. The impasse in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and the resultant frustration, mistrust and violence have led to a dismantling of the multiple mechanisms established to increase cooperation and harmony between the two sides. Over 1,800 Palestinians and 600 Israelis have lost their lives in this short period of time. Despite the best efforts of the protagonists and of other interested parties, the situation in the Middle East has continued to deteriorate.

It is important for the General Assembly to reflect upon the reasons why we have reached this precarious juncture today. It is important for us to take stock of

where we stand on the complex issue involving Israel and the Palestinians.

Israel has failed to understand the limitations of a unidimensional policy based on a military approach without recourse to a concomitant political approach. Its policy of military blockades, curfews and restrictions imposed on Palestinian areas have resulted in economic deprivation, the disruption of normal life, loss of freedom and, most importantly, the demoralization of the Palestinian population. This has resulted in continuing acts of violence and retribution against Israeli forces and civilians.

As a number of United Nations studies have established, the closures in the Palestinian areas have given rise to a grave humanitarian situation that continues to deteriorate. We note that the United Nations has recently announced a humanitarian plan of action prepared on the basis of a report by the Secretary-General's Personal Humanitarian Envoy, who visited the region in August 2002. The United Nations bears a major responsibility to provide economic relief and sustenance to the beleaguered Palestinian population. While acknowledging the contribution of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, we urge them to continue to do all that is necessary in this regard.

As in the past, India reiterates its call to Israel to take immediate steps to lift the closures and blockades and to ease the economic hardship of Palestinians in the occupied territories. Israel must freeze its settlement expansion activity as the first step in the gradual dismantling of settlements in the West Bank and in Gaza. That would be an important confidence-building measure.

At the same time, the almost incessant instances of terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, resulting in the heavy loss of innocent life, have to end. India has consistently called for an immediate cessation of violence, whether on account of military action or acts of terror against innocent and unarmed civilians. India believes that all acts of violence and terrorism have to be abjured in absolute terms. There can be no moral justification for terrorism on any grounds, whether political, ideological, religious or any other.

The continuing deterioration of the situation and the ongoing cycle of violence highlight the need for a political solution. Preoccupation with elections, both in Israel and within the Palestinian Authority, is not sufficient reason to lose the momentum for developing a political framework for peace. The Secretary-General recently stated that the road map for achieving a two-State solution within a three-year time frame being developed by the Quartet can play a vital role in breaking the cycle of violence and promoting a peaceful settlement.

India supports the efforts by the Quartet and initiatives such as that of Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdullah adopted by the Arab League Summit in Beirut in March 2002, in resolving this outstanding issue. We share the view of many others that the conflict can be resolved only through negotiations. We call upon all sides to desist from violence, as demanded in the recently adopted Security Council resolution 1435 (2002).

India believes in the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and peaceful borders, as affirmed by Security Council resolution 1397 (2002). We hope that day will not be too long in coming.

Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000 in conformity with resolution 425 (1978) has, unfortunately, not resulted in the hoped-for lasting peace and tranquillity in the area. Regular transgressions of the Blue Line are provocations that need to be addressed by the sides concerned. We believe that the presence of the highly professional United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has contributed greatly to minimizing incidents along that border. In this context, we wish to commend UNIFIL for its stellar performance in the face of adversity and challenge.

The current disruptions evident in the Palestinian peace process have had an adverse impact on the Syrian track of negotiations as well. We are hopeful that the circumstances for the resumption of negotiations on the issue of the return of the Syrian Golan will arise in the near future, leading to a comprehensive settlement of all issues in the Middle East.

Mr. Sharma (Nepal): Day in and day out, the situation in the Middle East painfully pricks the human conscience, as the vortex of violence mercilessly swallows innocent men, women and children. Two peoples of a rich civilization and heritage are at loggerheads, spilling blood and inflicting misery for too long.

In the second intifada alone, more than 2,000 lives have been lost. The toll has been high on both sides, but higher on the Palestinian side. The Palestinian economy and infrastructure have been totally ruined. Our heart goes out to those men, women and children who have lost their near and dear ones in Palestine and in Israel and who have become victims of the cruel fate that continues to cast a dark shadow on the Middle East.

Nepal strongly condemns terrorism and supports action against it. It also denounces violence against innocent civilians, be it perpetrated by a State or by extremists. These atrocities must cease in order for the healing process to begin and for peace and amity to prevail in the region.

We all know that there is no shortcut to peace in the Middle East. Neither is there a military solution to the complex problem besetting the region. Undoubtedly, Israel has the right to exist and to live in peace within its borders. Equally legitimate is the right of the Palestinians to have their own independent and viable State. Both sides will have to learn to find a way to live together. For this, both sides will have to make painful compromises. They will have to give space to each other on the small piece of land that has the pride of being the fountain of three major world civilizations, all of which teach love, compassion and peace. We must bring those eternal values to bear on our quest for comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Attacks against the Palestinian leadership, the occupation of Palestinian territories and the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza will not ensure peace for Israel. Neither will punishing the entire Palestinian society for the crimes of a few extremists win glory or goodwill for the Israeli Government. Those measures only foment hostilities among the Palestinians. Therefore, Israel must lift its siege on the Palestinian territories and withdraw from the occupied and reoccupied areas. It must stop using excessive force against Palestinian civilians. It must freeze the construction of new settlements in Palestinian territory and dismantle the ones that have already been built. It must also immediately open political negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, without preconditions, thereby giving hope to the Palestinian people for a State sooner rather than later.

In the same vein, attacks against Israeli civilians will only hurt the Palestinian cause by strengthening the hand of the conservatives and alienating the moderates in Israel who could help to advance the two-State formula proposed by the Quartet and other actors.

The Palestinian Authority must curb the extremist elements and the global community must help it to do so. It requires assistance if it is to revive the economy, create jobs for young people and resuscitate its security and physical infrastructure. More importantly, it requires a clear proposal for a viable Palestinian State within a feasible time frame. Without such light at the end of the tunnel, the Palestinian population will remain susceptible to the destructive designs of the extremist elements.

In this context, Nepal supports the Quartet agreement arrived at early this year, the Saudi proposal and all relevant Security Council resolutions that provide a useful framework for a durable and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Destiny has brought the Palestinians and Israelis together. No matter what, they will have to live in the Middle East with each other; better that they care for each other than that they kill each other. Efforts must therefore be exerted to prevent a further poisoning of the atmosphere and to warm relations between the two peoples.

No progress will be possible until the Israelis and Palestinians themselves display greater resilience and commitment to finding a durable peace. The global community must do more — and do it urgently — to deal seriously with the peace and security that has eluded the region for so long, by promoting broader peace in the region, embracing the Lebanese and Syrian fronts, as well.

Both Israelis and Palestinians should be able to send their children to school without fear. They should be able to coexist in peace and harmony. And they should be able to pursue their own way of life in freedom and dignity.

Mr. Negroponte (United States of America): The United States remains firmly committed to achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The recent upsurge in violence in the region is deeply troubling to us. We have repeatedly urged both sides to take immediate steps to ease the situation and refrain from words and actions that inflame tensions and complicate efforts to find peaceful solutions that allow the peoples of the region to live in peace, security and dignity.

The goal of the United States is to end all violence and terror in the region and to lay out a path to end the occupation that began in 1967. In working towards this goal, the United States is closely engaged with the Israelis and Palestinians, regional leaders, our Quartet partners and the International Task Force on Palestinian Reform. We believe that a negotiated final settlement can be accomplished in three years.

The centrepiece of our current efforts is a road map designed to help promote practical efforts to achieve four objectives. These are, first, to implement the strategy of promoting Palestinian institutional and security reform; secondly, to ease the humanitarian situation inside Palestinian areas; thirdly, to end violence and terror and restore security cooperation; and fourthly, to restore a political dialogue that would realize President Bush's vision of a final settlement based on two States living side by side in peace and security. The road map we are discussing will clearly lay out obligations and responsibilities on all sides. Progress from one phase to another would be performance-based.

This strategy and the road map are based on relevant Security Council resolutions, President Bush's speech of 24 June and the Arab League Beirut Summit initiative. They also seek to incorporate the Madrid terms of reference and previous agreements between the parties. The approach is aimed at a comprehensive peace with security for all States of the region, as called for in the Beirut Summit Declaration.

We would welcome a draft resolution under this agenda item that reflected a balanced and pragmatic approach consistent with that of the Quartet. Unfortunately, it appears that we will be considering texts that put this body in the position of attempting to prejudge the settlement of the question of Jerusalem and other final-status issues. To achieve a lasting peace, these issues must be decided through negotiations between the parties, consistent with their past agreements and with relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Blazey (Australia): I should like at the outset to register my country's deepest condolences to the Governments and the peoples of Kenya and of Israel for the deplorable attacks in Mombasa last week. The spectre of terrorism hangs heavy for Australians, who are still mourning the victims of the Bali bombings on 12 October this year, in which many innocent Australians, Indonesians and other nationals lost their lives. No member of the international community can any longer feel immune from threats to their security. None of us has any choice but to pursue the fight against terrorists and their networks.

In its statement last year, Australia expressed its deep frustration over the stalled Middle East peace process and Iraq's failure to cooperate with the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission to achieve full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions. While we welcome the beginning of inspections in Iraq, developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have reinforced our concerns about the Middle East peace process. We must act to stop the situation from deteriorating further.

In the open Security Council debate on Iraq in October, Australia, with others, called on the members of the Security Council to adopt a new and robust resolution which would provide the strongest possible basis for unconditional and unfettered weapons inspections. Resolution 1441 (2002) does just that. It sets out a process by which the disarming of Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction can proceed peacefully. Australia has confidence in that process and supports it wholeheartedly. We welcome Iraq's decision to accept the United Nations inspectors, although this decision must be tested on the ground.

We look to the Government of Iraq to make a full declaration of its weapons of mass destruction holdings, to give United Nations inspectors full access and to provide for continuing monitoring and verification to prove that it has given up these weapons permanently. The Government of Iraq can and must do all these things and thus resolve the situation peacefully. For the sake of the Iraqi people, we hope that it will.

Security Council resolution 1397 (2002), which Australia strongly supported, affirmed a vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders.

Australia is committed to this vision and to a negotiated settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the principle of land for peace. We have repeatedly urged the parties to return to the negotiating table. Australia supports wholeheartedly Israel's territorial integrity and its right to live in peace.

We continue to recognize the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. We see a Palestinian State as an inevitable part of a peaceful settlement. My Government has said that it would be generous in its support for a new Palestinian State.

In 2002-2003, Australia will provide an estimated $11.9 million in development assistance to the Middle East. Most of our assistance programme is focused on the Palestinian territories and on Palestinian refugees. As a significant contributor to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), we are deeply concerned at the fatal shooting of Mr. Ian Hook, an employee of UNRWA, during an Israeli army raid on the Jenin refugee camp.

It is disappointing and distressing to see the continuation of senseless violence and destruction. We have said repeatedly that the deplorable targeting of innocent Israeli civilians by Palestinian suicide bombers are abhorrent and do the Palestinian cause no good. We urge Israel to act in a way which avoids disproportionate or reckless use of force, resulting in the killing of innocent civilians, and which risks encouraging the most violent of extremist groups while antagonizing those Palestinians who are ready to live side by side with Israel in their own State.

Despite the present discouraging situation, we look forward to the release of the road map to peace devised by the Quartet. We hope that it will be given a chance to work. In the meantime, neither side should make the mistake of alienating through violence those who are willing and ready to negotiate a settlement Both sides must beware of dashing hopes of peace by killing innocents.

Australia has a substantial and multifaceted relationship with the countries of the Middle East. We enjoy an expanding network of connections through trade — which has been growing rapidly — as well as through tourism, education and culture. We also have a large and vibrant community of Arab descent in Australia, which is part of the great diversity of cultures in our country. Australia has an important stake in the future of the Middle East region, and we will do what we can to contribute to its peace, security and prosperity.

In closing, I would like to make mention of the recent passing of Abba Eban, a pioneer of Israel's diplomacy and a distinguished statesman who spearheaded Israel's campaign for recognition in the United Nations and who represented Israel in this forum. His observation that "History teaches us that men behave wisely once they have exhausted all other alternatives" seems apt today. I am sure that, if he were here, he would join us in the hope that we would act with wisdom well before having reached that point.

Mr. Zackheos (Cyprus): Cyprus has aligned itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union by the representative of Denmark.

There is no doubt that no other conflict has generated more concern and emotion internationally than the one in the Middle East. Cyprus has repeatedly and consistently expressed sorrow and concern at the collapse of the peace process and at the escalation of violence and the loss of so many lives, which has continued unabated for the past two years. The current situation clearly demonstrates once again the grave consequences of the long delay in finding a solution to the Palestinian problem.

All interested parties and the international community at large should consider with the utmost seriousness and urgency the tragic daily reality of this conflict, which exacerbates the plight of the Palestinians and affects the lives of millions of innocent people on a daily basis. We urge once again maximum restraint, since it has been demonstrated that resort to violence not only fails to produce any tangible benefits, but, on the contrary, aggravates an already tense situation.

In this context, I would like, on behalf of the Government and the people of the Republic of Cyprus, strongly to condemn the terrorist attack that took place in Kenya on 28 November, as well as the preceding attacks in Hebron and Jerusalem. We are particularly pained by the tragic loss of life and wounding of innocent victims, especially children, and we feel the grief of every mother, whether Israeli or Arab.

Time and again, Cyprus has indicated that it shares the view that the Palestinian issue constitutes the core of the Middle East conflict. My country has also called for a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Middle East problem, including on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002). We reiterate our long-held position on the inadmissibility of foreign occupation and the acquisition of territory by war, and we declare our

support for the right of every State in the region, including Israel, to live in peace and security.

We believe that the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War should be fully respected. In our view, solutions to international conflicts must safeguard the basic tenets of justice and international legality, and maintain and restore the dignity of individuals. We believe that peace efforts and initiatives for the achievement of peace and stability should be based on international law. It is important that solutions to regional problems be perceived as fair, and accepted as such, by the populations concerned.

Prolonged occupation brings frustration, which can lead to acts of desperation. The Palestinian people must be able to look forward to the prospect of an early end to their unacceptable situation. In this context, we reiterate our support for the fulfilment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the creation of their own State, whose realization is long overdue. We fully support the vision of Israeli and Palestinian States, living side by side, within recognized borders, in peace and security.

We call for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from reoccupied areas, the lifting of the severe restrictions imposed on the Palestinian population; the lifting of the blockade on the occupied territories; ensuring the safety of humanitarian personnel; and putting an end to extrajudicial killings. Due to our own experience of the negative effects of settlements, which are illegal under international law and an impediment to the achievement of peace, we reiterate our opposition to this kind of activity and call for its cessation and reversal.

While speaking about the situation in Cyprus, we have on various occasions expressed our view that the policy of illegal settlements can neither be condoned nor accepted and its effects or objectives cannot be legalized ex post facto.

We welcome the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted last March at the Beirut Summit of the League of Arab States. We also strongly support all international efforts, including those of the Middle East Quartet, and the creation of a road map, outlining the steps towards Palestinian statehood.

We share the view that the inability of the international community to put an end to the unacceptable situation in the Middle East undermines the credibility of the system of collective security. The world community should break its silence. It should call upon both sides to return to the negotiating table and find a just and viable settlement. No excuse should be used for maintaining the present unacceptable situation or for intensifying the conflict. The Israelis deserve security while the Palestinians deserve the recognition of their inalienable rights.

I would like to reaffirm the readiness of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus to assist in any way deemed appropriate by the parties, including by hosting meetings. Our constructive role in the region, based on the traditional relations with all parties involved in the conflict, has been demonstrated in practice on many occasions. Our assistance in breaking the impasse in the Church of Nativity is a recent example.

We have no doubt that a solution to the Middle East conflict will lead to a greater sense of safety and justice at both the regional and the international level. We also realize that without such a settlement any prospect of regional economic cooperation is almost utopian.

We believe that the forces of moderation should be strengthened and the extremists from all sides should be isolated. Only in this way will we manage to revive the hope of the vast majority of the peoples of our region for the establishment of a permanent peace and realize the vision of a new Middle East on which so many hopes and expectations were generated in the 1990s.

Mr. Diab (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At a time when foreign occupation has receded from all parts of the earth, the General Assembly meets once again to discuss the agenda item on the situation in the Middle East. That situation is reflected in Israel's continued occupation of Arab territories in Palestine and Syria, in addition to the Sheb'a farms in Lebanon.

When we talk about the Arab-Israeli conflict, we must remember its historical causes so that we can justly assess the present period, which is the most important in that history.

The establishment of the League of Nations in 1919 was an important milestone for lands that were subject to colonialism in the Middle East. The principle of the right of people to self-determination, which was

established by United States President Woodrow Wilson in this period, was a landmark in the history of liberation from colonialism, because it emphasized the importance of non-discrimination among peoples. It also stressed equality between the interests of people and their right to establish their own independent State.

Despite the fact that these rights were endorsed by the League of Nations, they were denied to the Palestinian people because of the infringement of the Balfour Declaration upon their legitimate rights. History mentions the recognition by the League of Nations of the gradual independence of the Arab States that were colonies of the Ottoman Empire. The League also envisaged a mandate authority over those States to help administer them, to build their own institutions and to enable them to achieve their own independence. Palestine was among the Arab States falling under this principle.

Since 1948, Israel has occupied Arab territories, expelled its indigenous population and established illegal settlements. In 1967, it occupied East Jerusalem, annexed it illegally in 1980 and declared it the eternal capital of Israel. Israel has ignored Security Council resolutions emphasizing the illegality of such procedures, particularly resolution 242 (1967), which stressed the illegality of occupying the lands of others by force, and resolution 478 (1980), in which the Council decided not to recognize what is called the basic statute concerning Jerusalem. Israel has completely flouted the international community by using illegal means to change the natural and demographic features of the city of Al-Quds, thus imposing a fait accompli. Israel has continued to annex the Arab territories that it has occupied by force since 1967 by elaborating a cancerous policy that requires the establishment of illegal settlements on occupied Palestinian and Syrian territories and that encourages extremist Jewish settlers, whom it invites from all parts of the world, to settle illegally in the occupied Arab territories. It then provides them with weapons to terrorize the Arab population and force them to leave, losing the right to their own land.

In order to carry out its colonialist policy Israel practises collective punishment against the Palestinian population. An example of that is Israel's policy of forcing the pumping of the waters of the occupied West Bank to the illegal Israeli settlements, depriving the Palestinian people of their natural right to these waters.

Many resolutions were adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council that have emphasized the illegal nature of Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories. In Security Council resolution 446 (1979), the Council affirmed that Israeli policies and practices that have led to establishing these settlements have no legal status and constitute a serious impediment to bringing about a just, comprehensive and permanent peace in the Middle East.

The Security Council reaffirmed its position in subsequent resolutions, particularly resolution 465 (1980), which determines that policies and practices followed by Israel to have its new immigrant population settle in Palestinian and other occupied Arab territories, which it has occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds, constitute a flagrant breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention. In February 1999, at its tenth emergency special session, the General Assembly, by an overwhelming majority, adopted resolution ES-10/6, calling for the application of the Fourth Geneva Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The world today is more convinced than ever before of the essential need to establish a State of Palestine as a fundamental step to bringing about peace in the Middle East. That conviction is reflected in the unprecedented international support received by Security Council resolution 1397 (2002), which affirms the Council's vision of a region in which two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognized borders. In addition to Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Arab peace initiative endorsed by the Beirut Arab Summit has received wide acceptance as a way of reaching a just and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The way to resolving that conflict became clear after Arab leaders at Beirut unanimously endorsed a fully integrated peace initiative calling for the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan, to the lines of 4 June 1967, and withdrawal from the rest of southern Lebanon. That proposal also called for resolving the problem of Palestinian refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), without resettling them. In addition, the proposal calls for Israel's acceptance of the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State on the territory occupied since 4 June 1967, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Once that

is done, Arab States would consider the Arab-Israeli conflict to be at an end and would establish a peace agreement with Israel, ensuring security for all, and would have normal relations with it.

The implementation of those concepts of peace continues to face Israel's ongoing aggression against the economic, political and human rights of the Palestinian people. Israel is also continuing its expansionist colonialist policies aimed at destroying the Palestinian entity and national identity. Those Israeli practices should cause the international community to do more than just deplore and condemn the situation. The international community should seek to find an effective mechanism to protect the Palestinian people and their rights, end Israel's occupation of Arab territories and ensure the fulfilment of Israel's commitment to implement resolutions of international legality.

The President took the Chair.

In that regard, I would like to remind the Assembly of the call made last week, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, by Ms. Phyllis Bennis on behalf of non-governmental organizations active on the question of Palestine. She appealed to the members of the General Assembly to assume their responsibility to ensure the implementation of United Nations resolutions and of international law in order to protect Palestinians under occupation.

In conclusion, allow me also to remind members that Lebanon also continues to suffer from Israel's violation of its sovereignty and airspace and its daily acts of aggression against its land and water resources. In that regard, we must also recall that Security Council resolution 425 (1978) called upon Israel to withdraw from all Lebanese territory. Everyone knows that full withdrawal must include withdrawal from all Lebanese waters and airspace, as well as the Sheb'a farms area, which Syria, and General Assembly and Security Council documents have established to be Lebanese territory. Those are lands that no country but Lebanon can claim as its own.

Mr. Heinbecker (Canada): The crisis in the Middle East grinds tragically on. Nearly every day innocent lives are lost and hope dims. Humanitarian conditions worsen and peace recedes. All of us know that none of the peoples of the region will live in peace until all of them live in peace. We all know also what must be done. Terrorism must end, violence must cease, incitement to hatred must stop and settlement activity. Only then can confidence begin to be rebuilt.

(*spoke in French*)

We all know that the parties, on their own, cannot achieve peace. We all know also that others cannot do it for them. All must work together, supporting the road map now being developed by the Quartet.

For our part, Canada stands ready to assist the parties to achieve the vision we all share of two viable States living side by side in peace and, ultimately, prosperity.

Mr. Al-Awadi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to make clear that Kuwait's position has not changed with respect to its support of Arab and Islamic concerns and to the agenda items on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East. Our position has been made clear in the numerous statements we have made during previous debates.

Kuwait firmly condemns all acts of violence and barbaric practices carried out by the Israeli Government against the Palestinian people. We call on the Israeli Government to put an end to its unjustified acts of aggression, its economic siege and its policy of colonialist expansionism, which can lead only to frustration and violence.

In making this statement, I cannot but make particular reference to the situation of Palestinian children and to their feelings of despair given the tragic situation resulting from the Israeli actions. All Israeli practices in this context — the continuing occupation of Arab territories in Palestine and the Syrian Golan; the ongoing threats against Lebanon's sovereignty; and the fierce and bloody campaign being waged against the Palestinian people — are blatant violations of the principles of international law, the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, the Charter of the United Nations, and the principle of international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

It is also particularly abhorrent that today Israeli injustices are extending to United Nations civil servants and international humanitarian organizations working in the Palestinian territories. We condemn the murder of Iain John Hook, United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) Project Manager, as well as

the acts of aggression perpetrated by the Israeli forces against the warehouses of the World Food Programme which recently took place in Gaza.

The Israeli Government no longer targets only Palestinian civilians but also all those means that help them survive the daily acts of genocide to which they are subjected. Kuwait expresses its full support for the Palestinian people and will participate in every effort to ease the difficult humanitarian situation that has prevailed since September 2000 — since Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Haram Al-Sharif mosque. We also condemn the repeated Israeli incursions into territories under the control of Palestinian Authority as well as the murder of innocent children.

Kuwait supports the resolutions that have been adopted in this regard and stresses the need to ensure the security of all civilians in the Middle East. We condemn all acts of violence that jeopardize the lives of civilians, particularly of children of whatever religion or nationality.

Kuwait has responded to all appeals based on the principles of international humanitarian law to help the Palestinian people. The Kuwaiti Red Crescent, despite severe difficulties, worked to ensure that such humanitarian assistance was able to get through, despite Israeli attempts to prevent this from happening. My Government has also continued to make contributions to UNRWA.

We have the honour to note that the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society received a letter of thanks and gratitude from the International Federation of the Red Cross for its provision of relief assistance in the West Bank and Gaza. Kuwait calls on the Security Council to fulfil its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and to impose its will on the Israeli Government, with a view to ensuring compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions and to protecting Palestinian civilians.

Here we would highlight the fact that the United Nations must play an important role in the process of finding solutions to the Palestinian problem and the Arab-Israeli conflict in all their aspects. This is an ongoing United Nations responsibility in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002). We must also continue to work to end this tragic situation through peaceful means, and negotiations must be resumed to find a peaceful solution on all tracks.

In this regard, Kuwait supports the efforts of the Quartet and the participation of the United States, which we hope will continue, alongside that of the European Union and the Russian Federation. If just, lasting and comprehensive peace is to be established in this region, we need first of all to agree that Israel's occupation of Arab territories since 1967 is the crux of the problem, and secondly that Israel should withdraw from the territories occupied since 1967 and should accept the establishment of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The principle of land for peace must also be implemented as well as the relevant United Nations resolutions.

We also support the initiative taken by the League of Arab States in Beirut in March, which endorsed the implementation of the principle of land for peace in the region.

Secondly, we support the position of the Secretary-General, who has stated that the solution to the Palestinian problem and the Arab-Israeli conflict cannot be achieved through force and violence, but only through dialogue and peaceful negotiations. The Israeli Government needs to be convinced of this principle.

Kuwait will continue to support the Palestinian people in order that they may finally exercise their right to self-determination and establish an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as stipulated in the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002). We call on Israel to withdraw from the Syrian Golan occupied since 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolution 497 (1981). Indeed, the occupation and annexation of the Syrian Golan is a major handicap to the establishment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.

Kuwait reiterates the illegality of the occupation of those Syrian territories. We share all the concerns expressed by the Permanent Representative of Syria in the statement he made yesterday from this very rostrum. We call on Israel to resume negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks from the point where they left off and to comply with the commitments it undertook during the negotiations. We also call on Israel to withdraw from all Lebanese territories, in accordance with resolution 425 (1978), to put an end to

its threats against Lebanon and to respect the sovereignty of that country and stop exploiting its natural resources so that it can proceed with its development projects, which we continue to support.

In conclusion, let me say that the Israeli Government needs to remember that security is a requirement for all peoples of the region, not just for the Palestinian people. Security cannot be achieved through campaigns of violence based on hatred of Muslims and Arabs. What we need, in keeping with our customs, religion and culture, is relationships based on peace. We must extend our hand in peace and commend each other, so that others will respond in kind.

However, the Israeli Government offers only violence, occupation, murder and oppression. We urge it to extend the hand of peace, so that the region could finally know the peace that it deserves.

Mr. Al-Malki (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Middle East region is going through a troubled and tense period because of the continued Israeli occupation of Arab territories and the setbacks in all tracks of the peace process, especially the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This situation is the result of Israel's departure from the just principles that have formed the basis of the peace process since it began at the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference. It should be noted that the Governments that have taken office in Israel since 1996 have all sought to derail the peace process through the use of brute force against Palestinian civilians, contrary to the spirit of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), other United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace. They have pursued a policy of procrastination, terrorism and non-compliance with international instruments and agreements.

My country condemns and denounces all acts of terrorism against innocent civilians, regardless of the motives behind those acts. Events have demonstrated that the use of force against the Palestinian people has given rise to counter-violence, which would end if Israel refrained from committing State terrorism and war crimes and terminated its occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories.

In that context, we call upon Israel to end its siege of the Palestinian Authority, cease the demolition of houses, remove roadblocks in Palestinian villages and towns, lift its siege on Islamic and Christian holy places, freeze settlement activity and enter seriously into negotiations.

Proof that Israel is not serious about ending the occupation is its rejection of the initiative of Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia. The Arab Peace Initiative was unanimously endorsed at the Beirut Arab Summit of last March and widely welcomed by the international community, as it conforms with the rules and principles of international law.

My country believes that the United Nations provides the basic framework for establishing international peace and security and for strengthening respect for international law. Disregarding the United Nations and settling conflicts and disputes outside its framework constitute a flagrant disregard for the credibility of the Organization and its principal organs, particularly the Security Council, whose resolutions must be observed without double standards or selectivity.

In that regard, my country stresses the need to implement Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which call for the withdrawal of Israel from the territories that it has occupied since June 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, as well as the implementation of General Assembly resolution 194 (III), whose operative paragraph 11 affirms the right of the Palestinians to return to their homeland and properties and to live in peace in their homeland. Security Council resolution 1397 (2002) has provided the framework for ending the spiral of violence and instability in the Middle East. My country therefore calls upon the international community, especially the members of the Security Council, to shoulder their responsibilities, to prevail upon the Government of Israel to comply with relevant international resolutions and to respond with sincerity and seriousness to the Arab and international initiatives.

My country supports the Syrian Arab Republic's right to recover the occupied Syrian Arab Golan and calls upon Israel to withdraw to the borders of 4 June 1967, to cease practices violating the human rights of the inhabitants of the occupied Arab territories and to cease its economic exploitation of the land and the population, as well as its policy of systematically encouraging illiteracy and historical and cultural distortion through education. Those policies aim at undermining the Arab nature of the Golan and at

erasing the Arab culture and heritage from the minds of the area's Syrian inhabitants.

My country also calls upon Israel to desist from building settlements and to put an end to the expulsion of inhabitants of the occupied Syrian Arab Golan from their lands. Here, we express our support for the return of the occupied Sheb'a farms to the Lebanese Republic and for the implementation of resolution 425 (1978), which Israel has ignored for more than 22 years. We also call upon Israel to desist from its attempt to control the water and natural resources of the Lebanese Republic, in accordance with the relevant international instruments and laws.

The Government of Israel has rejected the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, especially Security Council resolution 1405 (2002), which established the fact-finding commission on the Jenin massacre. The current policy of the Israeli Government is based on the principle of violence and State terrorism and the perpetration of the most terrible war crimes in pursuing its settlement and expansionist policies. Israel continues to stockpile weapons of mass destruction in its military arsenals and rejects efforts for a comprehensive and just solution to the question of the Middle East, while enjoying impunity. However, despite all this, it is our hope that a Government will come to office in Israel that will listen to logic and common sense and renounce those practices, making possible the establishment of peace, security and stability in the region and the creation of a better future, which will achieve peace, prosperity and happiness for the people of the region and the entire world in the third millennium.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Every day in the Middle East region, particularly in occupied Palestine, we learn about regrettable tragedies that the Palestinian people are enduring under the yoke of Israeli occupation. A painful tragedy is repeated daily before us, and the occupying Power does not want to understand the reality of that tragedy. Despite the fact that some Israeli citizens have become victims of the spiral of violence, the extremist voice of the Israeli street is mightier than the voice of wisdom and reality and fails to recognize that there is a people that looks forward to freedom and to establishing an independent State on its historic land — the land of Palestine.

We face the very difficult reality of Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and certain lands in south Lebanon. In view of that reality, the international community must impose sufficient pressure on the Israeli Government to halt the practice of violence, which violates all international laws and norms, to put an end to its occupation of those territories and to withdraw to the boundaries of 4 June 1967. Unless that happens, the spiral of violence and counter-violence in the Middle East will continue, mostly at the expense of the Palestinian people, which has lost its most cherished possession — its land.

We should all put ourselves in the situation in which the Palestinian people are living in order to understand the scope of the tragedy that they are experiencing. In addition to condemning the hateful occupation, we should condemn the systematic demolition of the houses of Palestinians, the elimination of their livelihoods and the wide-scale confiscation of their land.

Like all the peoples of the region, we look forward with hope to achieving a just and lasting peace — a peace that preserves the dignity and the rights of the Palestinian people, who have suffered enough from a hateful occupation. On this occasion, we should like to emphasize the Arab Peace Initiative aimed at halting the spiral of violence, endorsed by the League of Arab States at the Beirut Summit in March 2002, as the basis of a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, which has the question of Palestine at its core. That initiative has been widely accepted at the international level. We should like to reaffirm Security Council resolution 1397 (2002) — in which the Council reaffirmed for the first time its vision of a region in which two States, Israel and Palestine, exist side by side within secure and recognized borders — and our full support for the efforts of the Quartet to establish peace in the region. Because of their international influence, we are fully convinced that the Quartet's four members will be able to play a decisive role in finding a just and final settlement acceptable to all the parties.

We have great hope that the voice of reason and wisdom will prevail on Israeli leaders to choose the path of peace and to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable rights to self-determination and to establish an independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, so that the region and its people will have the opportunity to enjoy stability and to begin a new period

of development and of confidence-building among all the parties.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): For much of the 1990s, the peoples of the Middle East looked to the future with great optimism. For the first time in decades, nations and individuals allowed themselves to dream that the conflict that had raged for so long and had claimed so many innocent lives could be rendered a relic of history. They believed that we were entering an exciting new era in which conflict would yield to cooperation and the opportunities of a brave new world would replace history's bickering over land and resources. Today, much of that optimism and excitement has dissipated. Fear and worry have replaced the hope that once prevailed. We are now in danger of raising a new generation resigned to the reality of endless war.

We know from our history, however, that that need not be. While war and terrorism characterized much of the history of the Middle East in the past century, it is not the only path available to us. There is an alternative path: the path of dialogue and reconciliation, based upon respect for the rights of all States and an unshakeable commitment to non-violence and mutual recognition. It was that commitment that enabled Israel to conclude peace treaties with two of our neighbours, Egypt and Jordan. Those landmark events paved the way for the improvement of our relations with other States in the region and for the beginning of the Oslo peace process, which was intended to inaugurate a historic process of reconciliation with the Palestinian people. They also demonstrated conclusively that only a negotiated settlement can bring peace to the region and opportunity and prosperity to its peoples.

The violence and terrorism of the past two years threaten to reverse that trend and to return us to the path of confrontation. Unfortunately, while States in the region could be working to reduce tensions, some seem intent on exacerbating them and on making a return to a process of negotiations impossible. Such is the effect — if not the deliberate intent — of the policy of the Government of Lebanon, which, while clinging to the discredited and untenable position that Israel is occupying Lebanese lands, continues to support and encourage cross-border acts of aggression, in flagrant defiance of the will of the international community.

It should be recalled that Israel fully withdrew its forces from southern Lebanon in May 2000, in full compliance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978). That fact was confirmed by the Secretary-General, endorsed by the Security Council and repeatedly referred to in subsequent Security Council resolutions, most recently in resolution 1428 (2002). The responsibility now lies with the Government of Lebanon to fulfil its responsibilities under resolution 425 (1978) — namely, the deployment of its armed forces up to the Blue Line so as to reassert its effective authority in southern Lebanon and the restoration of peace and security in the area.

To date, however, the Government of Lebanon has given no indication that it plans to fulfil its responsibilities under international law. Rather than restoring its authority in the south, the Government of Lebanon has yielded the territory to the terrorist organization Hizbullah, which has turned it into one of the world's last bastions of utter lawlessness and a haven for terrorists. The organization has used this territory to train terrorists, provide them with safe haven and, through its global communications network, export its culture of suicidal terrorism to every corner of the globe.

While Hizbullah claims to be acting against Israel only to "liberate" Lebanese territory, recent statements by the organization's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, leave no doubt as to Hizbullah's ultimate intentions. In comments printed in Hizbullah's official magazine, *Al-Intiqad* on 15 November 2002, Nasrallah stated:

> "We view America as an enemy of the [Islamic] nation ... The American Government and the experts in America and Israel as well as the military generals were unable to eliminate the concept of suicide and the weapon of suicide attacks ... We must act in order to spread the concept of martyrdom for the realization of Allah's way as well as the act of suicide among the [Islamic] nation in order to protect our land."

Such comments should come as no surprise from the leader of an organization responsible for such notorious acts of terrorism as the bombing of the Multinational Force headquarters in Beirut in 1983; the hijacking of a TWA jetliner in June 1985; the bombing of the Embassy of Israel in Buenos Aires in 1992; and the bombing of the Jewish Mutual Assistance Association of Argentina (AMIA) Community Center

in the same city in 1994. And yet, despite Hizbullah's lengthy record of terrorist atrocities, Lebanon has taken no steps to confront the organization as is required under resolution 1373 (2001). Nor has Lebanon acted to respect its obligations under resolution 425 (1978) and subsequent resolutions that require it to respect the integrity of the Blue Line and ensure a calm environment in the south. Consequently, Lebanon continues to be a source of tension and instability and a threat to international peace and security.

Lebanon's failure to fulfil its responsibilities is the primary source of insecurity and instability along the Blue Line, but it is not the only source. The Government of Syria is also a major supporter of Hizbullah's terrorist activities. Syria allows Hizbullah to maintain training facilities in Syrian-controlled territory and grants its terrorists safe harbour and logistical support, for example by providing military escort for the transport of Iranian weapons through the Syrian capital of Damascus to Hizbullah's operatives in the field. Without this critical support from the Syrian regime, Hizbullah's operations would be severely limited.

But Syrian support for terrorism goes far beyond support for Hizbullah, and has continued — incredibly — even with that country's election to the Security Council. Groups such as Ahmad Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLPGC), the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) continue to incite and train terrorists and to coordinate and direct operations from their bases in Damascus. Just five days after Syria assumed the Presidency of the Security Council in June 2002, the leader of Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing in northern Israel that killed 17 and wounded over 40. Countless other examples could be cited of attacks carried out by Palestinian terrorist operatives who have received training, or have been directed, by individuals enjoying the safe haven provided by the Government of Syria.

Beyond Syria and Lebanon, the third and most significant supporter of Hizbullah is Iran, which has long been the organization's major patron, supplying it not only with funding, weapons and training, but also with the ideological inspiration and Islamic legitimacy necessary to ensure its broad appeal. It is also widely documented that Iran actively supports, finances, arms and trains terrorists sent to attack Israeli civilians by the Palestine Islamic Jihad and Hamas organizations.

Iran maintains a policy of complete and total rejection of Israel's right to exist and has actively pursued the weapons capability necessary to actualize that policy. With the Shihab-3 missile, Iran is pursuing the capability to strike Israeli cities. When it was paraded through the streets of Teheran in September 1998, the inscription on the missile carrier declared: "Israel should be wiped off the map". In light of its hostile intentions, as well as Iran's long association with known terrorist elements, the country's active pursuit of non-conventional-weapon strike capability, including chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, must be a source of tremendous concern to the international community.

Similarly, the Government of Iraq has demonstrated its ill intent towards Israel and other neighbouring States, has provided financial support for terrorism and has a long history of attempts to acquire non-conventional weapons capability, in defiance of Security Council resolutions. Iraq also has a brutal record of aggression. It has not only used weapons of mass destruction, but it has also indicated its willingness to do so again. Iraq must, therefore, continue to be the focus of a concerted international effort aimed at ridding that country of its non-conventional weapons capability. Israel supports the efforts of the Security Council in this regard and hopes those efforts will be brought swiftly to a successful conclusion.

Iraqi disarmament is of particular concern to Israel, which has been a target of Iraqi aggression. In addition to its attacks on Israeli cities during the Gulf War, Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, has actively supported Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israel. Saddam has provided the families of Palestinian terrorists with tens of thousands of dollars each and has already paid out several million dollars of such blood money. Such rewards are sure to perpetuate acts of suicide terrorism and derail efforts to calm tensions and restart the political process. The international community must continue to pressure Iraq in order to ensure its compliance with international law and to ensure that it does not possess the capability to threaten regional security.

It is particularly distressing that the support of Syria, Lebanon, Iran and Iraq for anti-Israel terror has

continued, even as the world has united to combat the common threat of terrorism. In the past year, the world has reawakened to the threat that terrorism poses to free societies all over the world and has resolved to combat this scourge, wherever it may breed.

Last week, terrorists attacked the Paradise Hotel in Mombasa, Kenya, killing 16 people, among them two Israeli brothers, ages 12 and 14. The bombing came only minutes after an attempt to blow up an Israeli passenger jet carrying 271 civilians as it took off from the Mombasa airport. Two shoulder-launched missiles barely missed their target, which averted what would have been a horrific catastrophe. The same day, six Israelis were killed, and more than 40 were wounded, when Palestinian gunmen loyal to Chairman Arafat detonated grenades and indiscriminately fired automatic weapons at people waiting to vote at a polling station in Beit She'an, in the north of Israel.

These three heinous terrorist acts, in addition to other recent terrorist attacks in Moscow, Bali, and Israel, confirm that international efforts to confront terrorism can neither be relaxed nor reduced. Terrorists operate as a network, and support or tolerance of any terrorist organization bolsters and empowers others. For the struggle against terrorism to be successful, the international community must be consistent in its condemnation of such acts and hold accountable all those who engage in or support the murder of innocents.

Israel has been on the front lines of the anti-terror campaign since its very inception. Indeed, in our region terrorists continue to arm themselves, clerics continue to inspire them and certain regimes continue to encourage them, all with the aim of preventing peace and coexistence from taking root in the Middle East. Failure to confront that threat will render impotent all efforts at peace and stability, whether in the Middle East or elsewhere.

The new millennium ushered in an era of tremendous hope and opportunity, but it also introduced us to a world of new dangers. In the Middle East, we are walking the razor's edge between the opportunities of the modern world and the terrorist threat that risks taking us back to the Middle Ages. All States must choose which of those paths they wish to follow — the path leading to cooperation and limitless possibilities, or the path of terrorism leading to pain, bloodshed and misery.

As it has been since its creation in 1948, Israel is committed to the former path. Our hand remains extended in peace. We are committed to negotiating fair and lasting solutions to all outstanding disputes in the region. We urge all our neighbours to join us in making that commitment — to peace, non-violence, coexistence and mutual recognition.

We are confident that if that commitment can be made, and if the necessary actions can be taken to give it substance, we will soon see the triumph of peace and reconciliation take root among all the peoples of the Middle East.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 36. I would like to inform Members that action on draft resolutions A/57/L.44 and A/57/L.45 will be taken after action on the draft resolutions under agenda item 35, entitled "Question of Palestine", has been taken.

Agenda item 35 (*continued*)

Question of Palestine

Draft resolutions (A/57/L.34, A/57/L.35, A/57/L.36, A/57/L.37)

The President: The General Assembly will now resume its consideration of agenda item 35, entitled "Question of Palestine". Members will recall that the General Assembly held a debate on this item at its 63rd and 64th plenary meetings, held on 29 November and 2 December.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolutions A/57/L.34 to A/57/L.37. We turn first to draft resolution A/57/L.34, entitled "Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People". I should like to announce that since the publication of the draft resolution, the following countries have also become sponsors of draft resolution A/57/L.34: Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Guinea, Pakistan and Zimbabwe.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belize, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam,

Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Philippines, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Saint Lucia, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:

Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), United States of America

Abstaining:

Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tonga, Tuvalu, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Yugoslavia

The draft resolution was adopted by 109 votes to 4, with 56 abstentions (resolution 57/107).

The President. I now turn to draft resolution A/57/L.35, entitled "Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat".

I should like to announce that since the publication of the draft resolution, the following countries have also become sponsors of draft resolution A/57/L.35: Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Guinea, Pakistan and Zimbabwe.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belize, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Philippines, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Saint Lucia, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:

Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), United States of America

Abstaining:

Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany,

Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tonga, Tuvalu, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Yugoslavia

The draft resolution was adopted by 108 votes to 4, with 56 abstentions (resolution 57/108).

The President: I turn next to draft resolution A/57/L.36, entitled "Special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat".

I should like to announce that since the publication of the draft resolution, the following countries have also become sponsors of draft resolution A/57/L.36: Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Guinea, Pakistan and Zimbabwe.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Timor-Leste, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:

Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, United States of America

The draft resolution was adopted by 159 votes to 5 (resolution 57/109).

The President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/57/L.37, entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine".

I should like to announce that since the publication of the draft resolution, the following countries have also become sponsors of draft resolution A/57/L.37: Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Guinea, Pakistan and Zimbabwe.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of

Korea, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Timor-Leste, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:

Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), United States of America

Abstaining:

Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Tuvalu

Draft resolution A/57/L.37 was adopted by 160 votes to 4, with 3 abstentions (resolution 57/110).

The President: Before giving the floor to speakers in explanation of vote after the vote, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Ms. Price (Canada): Canada supported this resolution because of our firm commitment to finding a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, we believe there is no military solution to this dispute. Violence must end, and negotiations must resume. Both the Palestinians and Israelis continue to suffer, and both must take the necessary steps outlined in this resolution to end this suffering.

Canada reiterates the resolution's emphasis of the importance of the safety and well-being of all civilians in the entire Middle East region, as well as our condemnation of all acts of violence and terror. We particularly condemn suicide attacks that target Israeli civilians, which are an affront to us all.

Canada does not consider any reference in operative paragraph 5 to represent a constraint on Israel's legitimate right to defend itself and to protect its citizens. The exercise of that right, however, must always be undertaken in accordance with international humanitarian law, particularly as it relates to the responsibilities of an occupying Power and the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated country, Turkey, as well as the European Free Trade Association country member of the European Economic Area, Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to explain the vote by these countries on the draft resolutions entitled "Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People" and "Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat".

During the last year, the Middle East has again been struck by great tragedy and violence resulting, inter alia, in an alarmingly high number of civilian casualties. The European Union strongly condemns the recent acts of terror and violence, which only serve to derail the process towards reconciliation. We are convinced that the framework of the peace process represents the only reasonable hope for ending a conflict which has already caused far too much suffering of the people involved. The European Union remains committed to working within the Quartet on a concrete, three-phased road map outlining the necessary steps towards a final Israeli-Palestinian settlement. Israelis and Palestinians must address the core issues that divide them, through sustained negotiations. Thus we continue to call on Israelis and

Palestinians to work actively with the Quartet and other parties to reach this objective, thereby realizing the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders.

The European Union regrets the fact that the terms of reference of these two United Nations bodies dealing with the question of Palestine do not sufficiently reflect the spirit of the peace process. For that reason, we have, as in the past, abstained on these two resolutions.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote after the vote.

The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 35.

Agenda item 36 (*continued*)

The situation in the Middle East

Draft resolutions A/57/L.44 and A/57/L.45

The President: The General Assembly will now revert to agenda item 36 to take action on draft resolutions A/57/L.44 and A/57/L.45. We first turn to draft resolution A/57/L.44, entitled "Jerusalem".

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Somalia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:

Costa Rica, Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), United States of America

Abstaining:

Albania, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu

Draft resolution A/57/L.44 was adopted by 154 votes to 5, with 6 abstentions (resolution 57/111).

The President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/57/L.45 entitled "The Syrian Golan".

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belize, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran

(Islamic Republic of), Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Philippines, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saint Lucia, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:

Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), United States of America

Abstaining:

Albania, Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Monaco, Nauru, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tonga, Tuvalu, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Yugoslavia

Draft resolution A/57/L.45 was adopted by 109 votes to 4, with 57 abstentions (resolution 57/112).

The President: Before giving the floor to speakers in explanation of vote after the vote, may I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Erdmann (United States of America): This year's resolution on Jerusalem seeks to impose specific terms on the issue of Jerusalem, which Israelis and Palestinians have agreed will be addressed in their final-status negotiations. The United States objects to this intrusion by the Assembly into the negotiations. Our position continues to be that Jerusalem is one of the final-status issues to be negotiated directly by the parties and the Quartet and others in the international community are working with the parties towards a resumption of political dialogue to make such negotiations possible.

The United States fully supports the internationally recognized right of religious freedom for all people.

Mr. Estremé (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Argentine Republic has voted in favour of draft resolution A/57/L.45 on the Syrian Golan because we believe that the essential aspect of the matter relates to the lawfulness of acquisition of territory by force. Article 2, section 4, of the United Nations Charter prohibits the use or threat of the use of force against the territorial integrity of a State. This is an imperative rule of international law.

At the same time, I wish to clarify the position of the Argentine delegation concerning operative paragraph 6 of the draft resolution. The vote of my country does not necessarily prejudge our position with regard to the reference to the line of 4 June 1967 contained in that paragraph.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated country Turkey — as well as the EFTA country of the European Economic Area Iceland align themselves with this statement.

Allow me to explain the vote by these countries on the draft resolution just adopted entitled "The Syrian Golan".

The European Union is deeply concerned about the continued deterioration of the situation in the Middle East. The current spiral of violence must cease. There can be no military solution to the Middle East conflict. A just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the situation in the Middle East, including the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), the Madrid terms of reference, in particular the

principle of land for peace, and the implementation of all existing agreements between the parties. We will continue to work relentlessly with the regional parties and within the Middle East Quartet towards that goal.

The European Union also wishes to point out that a final peace settlement will not be complete without taking account of the Israel-Syria and Israel-Lebanon aspects. Negotiations should resume as soon as possible with the aim of reaching an agreement. The European Union welcomes in this regard the Arab peace initiative endorsed at the Arab League Summit in Beirut, which offers the prospects of a comprehensive peace settlement for the whole Middle East region.

We believe that the resolution on the Syrian Golan contains geographical references which could undermine the process of bilateral negotiations. For that reason, as in previous years, the European Union abstained in the vote.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote after the vote. The Observer of Palestine asked to make a statement after the adoption.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine): We are indeed very pleased with the results of the vote, which reflect overwhelming support for the five resolutions just adopted. We would like to express our thanks and appreciation to all Member States who voted in favour of those resolutions. Our thanks, of course, go to the Chairman, members and the observers of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in particular Ambassador Papa Louis Fall, the Permanent Representative of Senegal. The Committee has indeed made valuable efforts to preserve the question of Palestine and upholding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as well as affirming the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards that question until it is effectively solved in all its aspects.

The resolutions just adopted are indeed important ones, especially those of a political nature: the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, as well as the resolution on Jerusalem.

We appreciate the unanimous support of the first resolution given by the European Union and we look forward to seeing positives votes in favour of the resolution on the Committee of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights next year.

At the same time, we were shocked to see the negative United States vote on the draft resolution on Jerusalem. Needless to say, that vote represents an important negative change in the voting pattern of that delegation. We believe that such a vote represents a slap in the face of all Arabs and Muslim and Christian believers who would want to see a different situation in that holy city. We also believe that vote undermines efforts to reach a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, and in particular of the issue of Jerusalem. Let me also say that the changes made in the draft resolution were minimal and that they were made very cautiously. The delegation of the United States did not attempt to negotiate the text, or even to indicate the difficulties it may have had with the text as it was presented.

Allow me also to make a few comments about the claim made regarding the resolutions just adopted, namely, that they prejudge the outcome of the peace process. We do not believe those resolutions prejudge the outcome any more than international humanitarian law would prejudge the outcome of any dispute anywhere and at any time. Those resolutions merely reiterate principles of international law and the minimum requirements of justice and equity. The parties can, and will, negotiate the details of a settlement, but without legitimizing illegal Israeli designs and while being in compliance with the agreed basis for a settlement.

Attempts to neutralize the United Nations are, unfortunately, aimed at allowing Israel to impose as facts the results of its continuous violations of international law and of relevant Security Council and other United Nations resolutions. It is also an attempt to leave the Palestinian people at the mercy of the imbalance of power on the ground and to deprive them of the benefit of any existing rules and laws. Let me therefore reiterate the importance of those resolutions, as well as the positive position taken by the overwhelming majority of Member States to uphold international law and to act in line with the permanent responsibility of the United Nations.

Two days ago, we listened very carefully to the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Israel in the Assembly during the debate on the question of Palestine. We felt optimistic indeed that there was a voice of reason and moderation assuring the international community that a peaceful settlement was in fact possible. Unfortunately, our optimism did

not last. Only hours after that, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Israeli Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu both reprimanded that representative, and clearly stated that what he said did not reflect the position of the Government and that the Israeli Government had not accepted the vision of a two-State solution.

We are therefore once more left with a clear manifestation of the crux of the problem and the real position of this Israeli Government and of people like Mr. Sharon and Mr. Netanyahu, who are supported by military leaders implicated in war crimes, such as General Shaul Moufaz and General Moshe Yaalon. We nevertheless will remain faithful to the peace process. We are not going to lose hope. We believe that, with the help of the international community and persistent positions and messages such as the message sent today by the General Assembly, the parties will be able to overcome obstacles and will indeed soon reach a final settlement establishing lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation would like to extend its heartfelt gratitude to all the delegations that voted in favour of the resolution on the occupied Syrian Golan. The General Assembly's adoption of that resolution means a great deal to our people and to all who believe in the essential need to end occupation wherever it exists. The resolution has once again reaffirmed a clear and succinct message that leaves no doubt that occupation, the building of settlements and the denial of people's rights should all be rejected.

The General Assembly has sent a clear message about the inadmissibility of the acquisition of the territory of others by force and about the fact that this matter is of great interest to every nation of the world that wants to bring occupation to an end. In that resolution the Assembly has also expressed its serious concern with regard to Israel's failure to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan, which has now been under occupation for more than 32 years. The Assembly is sending a message to Israel that it should understand that its decision to extend its jurisdiction, laws and administration to the occupied Syrian Golan is null and void and has no legal force whatever. In addition, the Assembly has also decided that Israel's continued occupation and annexation of the Syrian Golan constitutes a serious obstacle to establishing a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

The international community's voice should be heard, and the occupying Power must heed that voice. A solution will come about only through Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories and its restoration of the rights of peoples, particularly those of Palestinians and of Syrian citizens forcibly expelled from their lands, villages and towns. Peace and security are interlinked; security cannot be established in the absence of peace.

I would like to reiterate Syria's gratitude to all delegations that expressed their solidarity with Syria by voting in favour of the resolution. I would also like to emphasize to all States Members of the United Nations that Syria will continue to seek a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East.

The President: A number of delegations have asked to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation, like others, has grown accustomed to listening to statements by the representative of Israel that assert everything but the truth. The representative of Israel's statement was full of lies, misinformation and accusations hurled in all directions — except at Israel. We would like to make it clear to States Members of the General Assembly is that the Israeli occupation of Arab territories is the main cause of all the tragedies experienced by the region. What the representative of Israel failed to say in his statement is that it was Israel that brought terrorism to the Middle East — perpetrating terrorist acts against millions of Palestinians, Syrians, Lebanese and citizens of other Arab countries.

It is well known that Israel has carried out some of the most horrific terrorist acts, in the form of assassinations and extrajudicial executions, in some of the world's capitals. My colleagues from these capitals know about the terrorist acts perpetrated by Israel in their countries. The tears that Israel sheds for the victims of terrorism in many parts of the world are nothing more than crocodile tears. Israel is trying to divert attention from its crimes, which include assassinations and extrajudicial executions, the demolition of houses, the use of aircraft and tanks to bomb innocent civilians and the displacement of

innocent civilians, as well as other horrific forms of oppression, killing and terrorism.

The Israeli statement referred to Hizbullah. We know why Israel hates Hizbullah: it is the power that has been able to put an end to its occupation of southern Lebanon after Israel's refusal to implement United Nations resolutions, including resolution 425 (1978), for more than 20 years. As is well known, Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon started in 1982.

As for what the representative of Israel said concerning Syria's support for a number of Palestinian factions, we would like to reaffirm before the Assembly that those Palestinians who are residing in Syria are actually victims of Israeli aggression and terrorism. The more than half a million Palestinians displaced since 1948 who reside in Syria have not to date been allowed to even dream of returning to their homeland. Who is responsible for that? Israel is the main party responsible.

I would like to stress that Palestinian offices in Syria are nothing more than public information offices. I believe that anyone can establish a public information office that reflects the aspirations of the people to return to their country and to exercise their human rights. The claim that they undertake terrorist operations in the occupied Palestinian territories is false and has no basis in reality. The fact is that people would have to be on their land to be able to undertake such acts. Those Palestinians who are scattered all over the world cannot plan to undertake operations against Israel, in particular if they are outside the occupied territories in which such operations are undertaken.

Israel is always trying to blame others to justify its criminal acts and its violation of international instruments and agreements, particularly the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War.

Syria has clarified more than once that the Palestinian presence in Syria is temporary and will continue only until conditions are right for the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland and their property, as they have the legitimate right to establish their own independent country on their national soil.

Putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, halting the confiscation of land and the demolition of houses, putting an end to the uprooting of trees and the killing of children, women and the elderly and freezing the construction of racist settlements, together with a commitment to international legally binding resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace, are the only way to safeguard peace and stability in the region.

Mr. Diab (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Israeli representative alleged that his Government implemented Security Council resolution 425 (1978) in order to comply with international law. Everyone knows that Israel, which continued to occupy southern Lebanon for 22 years, in flagrant defiance of that resolution, would not have withdrawn from southern Lebanon but for the valiant Lebanese resistance, which forced it to withdraw, and which enjoyed the support of the Government and the people of Lebanon.

The Lebanese resistance against Israel would not have developed had it not been for Israel's rejection of resolution 425 (1978) for the 22 years of its occupation of southern Lebanon.

We would also like to remind the representative of Israel that his Government is still in breach of resolution 425 (1978) as a result of the daily violation by the Israeli occupation forces of Lebanon's sovereignty by air, land and sea. The Secretary-General considered those breaches as acts of provocation that have become a routine phenomenon.

In any event, the Security Council still considers Israel to be the only occupying Power in the world. Israel continues to occupy Arab territories, including the Lebanese Sheb'a farms. This undermines stability and security in the region. It is a strange irony for the representative of Israel to claim that Lebanon's demand for its own territories undermines peace and security in the region. Are the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions — which have been referred to by one speaker after another over the past few days — and the resolutions that have been adopted today by an overwhelming majority insufficient to make the Israeli representative understand that occupation is undermining peace and security throughout the world?

With regard to the demand for an end to occupation: that is legitimate, as guaranteed by international laws and instruments, and States have the right to make such a demand.

I should like to correct the Israeli representative's personal interpretation of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001), because the Council never mentioned Hizbullah in that resolution. The Government of Lebanon has cooperated with the Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee; it has sent its periodic reports and has been consistently commended for its cooperation by the Committee's Chairman. In its response to the Counter-Terrorism Committee, Lebanon defined its position with regard to the need to differentiate between resistance and the terrorism that Israel carries out through its army and its armed settlers against the Palestinian people.

Concerning the accusations that the Israeli representative levelled against the Lebanese Hizbullah, they spring from Israel's hatred of the Lebanese resistance, which, by its 22-year struggle against occupation, forced the Israeli army to withdraw from Lebanese territories. The Israeli representative cannot understand how a small resistance group, because of its belief in its land and in its cause, managed to defeat the fourth most powerful army in the world and to force that army out of its sacred land. He is trying to distort the valiant and legitimate image of the Lebanese resistance, which constitutes a milestone in the history of liberation from occupation.

We wish that the Israeli representative, instead of focusing most of the statement that he made before the Assembly today on false allegations against the Lebanese resistance and Hizbullah, had responded to the General Assembly resolutions calling on Israel to take specific measures to put an end to its occupation and to its illegitimate settlement activities in the occupied Arab territories.

Mr. Hamzehei (Islamic Republic of Iran): The unsubstantiated assertions made today by the representative of Israel against my country are meant to divert attention from the brutality, atrocities and violations carried out against the Palestinian people. It is astonishing that a regime with a dark record of developing, producing and stockpiling many kinds of inhuman weapons of mass destruction ventures to accuse a country that is among those in the Middle East that have joined the most basic international instruments in effect in the field of disarmament. Despite numerous calls from the international community, Israel consistently refuses to join those instruments and continues its clandestine programme to develop and produce several kinds of weapons of mass destruction.

Israel remains the only non-party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East, and its record is no better in other fields of disarmament, particularly in the biological and chemical areas. And it is alarming that its nuclear programme and its unsafeguarded nuclear facilities continue to threaten regional and global peace and security.

Mr. Shacham (Israel): The representative of Syria would like us to believe that Israel is the source of terror in the Middle East and that, in fact, Syria is a leading force against terror. That Syria should attempt to divert attention from its well-known record of support for terrorism is not altogether surprising. Syria harbours, supports and encourages some of the most vicious terrorist organizations in the world, many of which have chosen, for that reason, to make their home quite comfortably in Damascus. I should like to mention in particular the Commander of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Ramadan Shallah, who does not run a public information office, but an office responsible for public destruction. Syria has even employed terrorist tactics against its own citizens, as it did in the hideous terrorist massacre committed by the Syrian regime in the city of Hama in 1982, in which 30,000 civilians were butchered, after which the neighbourhood was replaced by a parking lot.

As for Lebanon — whose territory continues to serve as a base for terrorist operations against Israel — its consistent refusal to prevent its territory from being used as a springboard for terrorist attacks against my country is the primary source of instability along the Blue Line. The Secretary-General has repeatedly drawn attention to that fact. Any attempt to accuse Israel of cross-border aggression is a thinly veiled attempt to divert attention from Lebanon's consistent failure to comply with the will of the international community.

With regard to the statements made by the representative of Iran, here we have yet another example of a State widely recognized as one of the world's leading sponsors of terrorism seeking to shift attention to so-called Israeli aggression. Iran is a primary supporter of Hizbullah terrorist operations and has had a hand in countless terrorist operations directed against Israelis and other nationals over the years in Israel and abroad.

I am confident that, for most representatives, the question of who is a terrorist is not a difficult one to answer. Perhaps, when the day comes when the regimes that have spoken here today can look at themselves in the mirror and see their true character, we will be able to overcome the major threat to peace and security in the new millennium and move forward to a future of peace and coexistence for the benefit of all the peoples of the region.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I regret to have to take the floor once again. However, the falsehoods contained in the Israeli statement prompt us to clarify matters. It is well known that a terrorist is one who commits aggression against the rights of others and violates the sanctity of another country's land and people.

Is there anything worse than a terrorist who occupies another people's land and who kills a people — a people that seeks only to live in peace and security? Throughout the years, Israel has perpetrated scores — even hundreds — of terrorist acts in numerous Arab countries and numerous European capitals. The truth is that Israel has occupied our Arab territories for more than 32 years. Can there be any terrorism worse than that?

My second question relates to what the Israeli representative called the offices of some Palestinian organizations in Damascus. We say that these offices do indeed exist. But why do they exist? For instance, there are no offices for Omanis in Syria, nor are there offices for Moroccan Arabs in Syria. Then why do these offices exist? They are for people who have been repressed, oppressed, tortured and targeted by terrorism all over the world.

The Israeli representative referred to the mirror into which each of us must look. When I look into the mirror, I see Syria, an example of commitment to the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the region. I see a Syria that does not commit aggression against others or occupy their land. I see a Syria that aspires to the establishment of justice in international relations. Most of all, I see a Syria that demonstrates unremitting cooperation in the fight against international terrorism. We have expressed this fact in the Security Council at all the meetings convened during our membership — and we are proud to have attained that membership, thanks to the nearly unanimous support of the international community, and through bilateral cooperation with any State wishing to cooperate with Syria in that regard.

But what does Israel see when it looks in the mirror — especially the one reflecting the new millennium? It sees occupation, murder, the destruction of houses and extrajudicial killings. That is what 99 per cent of the speakers referred to in addressing this Assembly. Is it not sufficient for Israel to know its practices and the crimes it has committed? Is it not enough to recall that Israel has been unscrupulously killing United Nations staff members, beginning with the killing of Count Bernadotte and ending with the killing of an international civil servant who was left to bleed to death? This is the Israel that should gaze into the mirror, consider its practices, its acts of murder and the crimes that it has committed.

In spite of everything that has been said, I would like to reiterate that Syria is fully committed to the establishment of a comprehensive and just peace in the region — a peace leading to the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, a complete Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and full withdrawal to the line of 4 June 1967, which the Assembly has just endorsed as the approach that must guide all States committed to the United Nations Charter, international legitimacy and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Mr. Shacham (Israel): I deeply regret the tenor of the last intervention of the Syrian representative, which is inappropriate for this Assembly. What we have seen here today is the familiar, yet reprehensible, tactic of blaming the victim rather than the perpetrator. My Syrian colleague has subverted morality by directing his accusations not towards those who engage in wholesale terrorism but rather towards those who are forced to defend themselves against it.

Although we truly wish to achieve a just, comprehensive and durable peace with our neighbours to the north, we have no illusions regarding the true character of the Syrian Government. I, like my Syrian colleague, could also use undiplomatic language. I could remind the members of this Assembly that Syria is a dictatorship; Syria is a police State; Syria is a cultivator and trafficker of narcotics; Syria is the military occupier of the territory of a neighbouring State; Syria has transferred millions of its citizens into that neighbouring State, displacing the indigenous population and usurping its economy; Syria is a State

that sponsors terrorism; Syria harbours in its capital terrorist organizations that actively and violently oppose the peace process in our region, butchering Israeli children in suicide bombings. I could say that Syria brutally murders entire neighbourhoods, tens of thousands of its own citizens, in order to silence political dissent. But I chose not to do so.

I will say, however, that any statement voiced by the delegation of Syria should be considered in the light of those facts, which are known by all, but which are diplomatically usually left unmentioned. It would suffice to say, however, that any Syrian interpretation of the meaning of the word terrorism is inherently suspect. As a matter of fact, when a regime such as that in Syria denigrates any other State for not adopting its definition of terrorism, I would interpret that as a compliment. I would, therefore, like to thank the representative of Syria for his comments, because, coming from him, those unrestrained attacks reassure me that Israel is indeed a nation which respects peace, justice and human dignity.

Mr. Diab (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Israel claims that he speaks diplomatically. Those who speak diplomatically should also act diplomatically, by implementing the resolutions of the General Assembly and other resolutions of international legality. Quite simply, I would like to join the majority of members who today voted in favour of the resolutions on the situation in the Middle East. We hope that the representative of Israel will realize that the occupation of the territories of others is the source of tragedy and instability. We have not adopted any resolutions today against Syria or Lebanon. The resolutions that we have adopted today are resolutions against Israel, and they have been adopted by an overwhelming majority of the Assembly. Perhaps the representative of Israel will learn from this.

The President: We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 36.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.

United Nations A/57/PV.67

General Assembly

Fifty-seventh session

Official Records

67th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 4 December 2002, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kavan ..... (Czech Republic)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 23

United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage

The President: Today, the General Assembly, pursuant to resolution 56/8 of 21 November 2001, will mark the end of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, under agenda item 23, entitled "United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage".

It has been said that culture is the mirror of humanity and that cultural heritage represents the historical record and understanding of the entire spirit of a people in terms of its values, actions, works, institutions, monuments and sites. The current Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) aptly described it in his message:

> "The cultural heritage of a people is the memory of its living culture. It is expressed in many different forms, both tangible and intangible. The origins of this heritage are multifarious too. In retracing its own cultural lineage, in recognizing the many different influences that have marked its history and shaped its identity, a people is better able to build peaceful relations with other peoples to pursue what is often an age-old dialogue and to forge its future."

On 21 November 2001, the General Assembly adopted resolution 56/8 to proclaim the year 2002 as the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage to raise awareness of the importance of protecting the world cultural heritage. The resolution invited the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to serve as the lead agency for the Year.

Cultural heritage is a testimony of everyday life. It includes monumental remnants as well as industrial heritage, local and indigenous knowledge, handicrafts, design, language, oral traditions, rites and beliefs, music, dance and song, medicinal and culinary traditions and so on.

All too often, heritage is the target of destruction by virtue of its value as a symbol and an identity. An attack on cultural heritage symbolizes attack on the group as such and indicates intolerance and hostility. The protection of heritage and its transmission to future generations are therefore ethical imperatives.

The proclamation of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage took place just nine months after the destruction of two giant 1,500-year-old sculptures of Buddha, representing a culture of tolerance in the Afghan Valley of Bamiyan. This barbarous act of the Taliban shocked the whole world and has been considered as a symbol of crimes against culture, but it is not the only example of cultural vandalism. Bosnia's cultural heritage was systematically destroyed to wipe out all traces of the past shared by the different communities. I recall the beauty of the well-known old bridge at Mostar, which not only connected two parts of one town, but also gave the name to the town and

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symbolized the symbiosis of Mostar's communities. It does not exist any more. Today, UNESCO and the World Bank are coordinating the work of multicultural teams rebuilding the Mostar bridge. I strongly believe that the new Mostar bridge will again symbolize tolerance and help to bridge the dark periods of the region's history.

I come from a region rich in cultural sites that have suffered from wars, plundering and, most recently, from flooding. We need protection strategies against natural disasters which have destroyed important cultural heritage sites.

Armed conflict poses the most obvious risk to the destruction of cultural heritage. As a result, the first international instrument on the protection of cultural heritage focused on this area. In 1954, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, strengthened by two Protocols. In 1970, the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property was adopted to combat plundering and trafficking of such property.

Thirty years ago, the 1972 Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, another fundamental pillar and the most popular and well-known in the body of legal text on heritage, was adopted. Today, the number of States parties has reached 175 and the Convention stands as a vital instrument for concrete action in preserving threatened cultural and natural sites. Furthermore, the Convention drew up the World Heritage List, which today includes 730 sites — 563 cultural, 144 natural and 23 mixed — in 125 countries. Bearing witness to exceptional achievements of civilizations and nature, these sites enjoy recognition for their outstanding universal value. On this special occasion, I would like to encourage countries that have not yet joined the Convention and other related international heritage protection instruments to do so at the earliest opportunity. I also urge the active involvement of institutions, organizations and individuals at the international, national and local levels to protect and preserve our common cultural heritage and to share the financial responsibilities.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): In the framework of the many social, political, economic and other issues of which the United Nations is seized, questions concerning culture are of a particular nature because, given sometimes conflicting economic and diverse political interests, cultural dialogue among peoples can serve to find common grounds of rapprochement, contact and cooperation. Such common grounds can help everyone to understand the manner and conditions in which others live.

Hence, the special importance of the issue before us today. If culture and cultural dialogue play this pivotal role in international relations, what then is the role of cultural heritage, one of the most significant sources of human civilization, irrespective of its origin or name? Cultural heritage is a cumulative product of diverse human experiences bequeathed to us by our ancestors as testimonies of their lives. It has recorded for us facts and experiences, either through the carving of sculpture in stone, metal or writing on stone or leather, such as poetry or cave drawings. These are all forms of human testimony to the long and arduous road that humankind has traversed — a long chain of varied experiences, successes and failures alike.

Our duty to our forebears makes us responsible not only for protecting and preserving their heritage, but also for studying it and extracting whatever eternal humanistic lessons and values it contains and passing them along to future generations that will carry the torch of hope on humankind's journey. It is incumbent upon us, today more than ever, to search for, reflect upon and grasp our cultural heritage so that we may explore the roots that it shares with other peoples and civilizations. It is up to us to find those roots, which constitute evidence of the common origins and destiny of all peoples of the world.

It is against this backdrop that the international community is today marking the end of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, in which 40 countries representing the five continents, including my own, have actively participated. The Year has brought together the various cultures and civilizations, demonstrating the noble message and objective that have united their representatives, despite their diversity and differences, to rally around a common goal: the maintenance of the common cultural heritage of humankind.

The proclamation of 2002 as the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage and the celebration this year of the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption in 1972 of the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural

and Natural Heritage give fresh impetus to enhancing universal awareness of the importance of common efforts to protect and promote that heritage, especially since 175 States have acceded to the Convention. The Convention was adopted 30 years ago to highlight the dangers facing the international community not just in terms of conventional factors, such as the passage of time and the erosion of cultural heritage, but also through changing social and economic factors that contribute to the loss of that heritage. Such great losses have affected the wealth of human cultural heritage in many parts of the world. Humankind has lost priceless cultural treasures and monuments that cannot be replaced. As the President of the General Assembly has just noted, such a loss was incurred in the recent tragic events in Afghanistan.

The Convention has the very noble mission of drawing up the World Heritage List, which now contains more than 730 sites of common human cultural heritage throughout the world. The international community is today cooperating to protect and develop those sites, the development of which is well coordinated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The considerable efforts made by UNESCO in recent decades to protect and maintain humankind's heritage from destruction have made its name synonymous with great cultural and humanistic values that embody the authenticity and preservation of whatever has worth and is precious in that cultural or natural heritage. UNESCO is the protecting body of the world's heritage, wherever and of whatever kind it may be. I could cite numerous examples of the vital role being played by UNESCO, first and foremost among which are its various campaigns throughout the world to protect humankind's heritage threatened with destruction. One such campaign, which Egypt holds in particular attachment, was that of the 1960s to protect the monuments of Nubia in southern Egypt from the destructive floods of the Nile. UNESCO has also adopted various conventions, including The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, adopted in 1954, and the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

The broad institutional experience of UNESCO is important and makes that organization the ideal vehicle for giving new impetus to the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, along with all interested States and other United Nations and international and civil society agencies. As the Year draws to a close, we encourage UNESCO to pursue its tireless efforts to protect the cultural heritage of humankind. We also urge all States to support UNESCO in fulfilling its noble mission to convert international solidarity into joint action to protect our common cultural heritage.

On this occasion, I wish to express our profound gratitude for the participation of the Greek Minister of Culture and other representatives in this meeting. Greece, of course, has a great and ancient history and civilization and has amply contributed to the Mediterranean dialogue for millennia. We hope that mankind will be able to protect the heritage of dialogue and constructive tolerance among civilizations.

Mr. Venizelos (Greece): Greece regards the decision of the General Assembly of the United Nations to declare 2002 the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage as a major political event of international significance. We therefore take particular pleasure in attending today's special session and the various events organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

This is an excellent opportunity to present before the Assembly three points of great interest with respect to Greek, as well as global, cultural heritage.

Greece is currently preparing for the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. The Olympic ideal and the noble tradition of the Olympic Games arouse deep emotions throughout the whole international community, bringing the world's people together around the Olympic flame and the Olympic truce. They are elements common to both Greek and global cultural heritage. They offer a characteristic example of the importance of the coexistence of material monuments, such as that of ancient Olympia, with intangible monuments such as the Olympic values of peace, competition and coexistence.

As a member of the European Union, Greece is organizing the most contemporary Olympic Games of the twenty-first century and has the unique advantage of being able to offer the authenticity of the Olympic sites and ideals. The Olympic Games are a very significant example of the important role played by cultural heritage in social and economic development.

In the context of the Olympic preparations, Greece is currently in the process of organizing, in association with UNESCO and the International Olympic Committee, a new international institution, the Cultural Olympiad, whose core message is the necessity of a culture of civilizations. It is essential that the international community acknowledge that, all too often, protracted military conflicts and major international problems are rooted in issues of religion, language, or ethnicity. In other words, they are, at their most profound level, cultural issues. The concept of a culture of civilizations is the only stance to ensure peaceful and meaningful dialogue between different cultures and to transform cultural differences into bridges of understanding and not into reasons for friction, misunderstanding and armed conflict.

However, the concept of a culture of civilizations also has its material aspect, involving the protection of symbolic monuments in regions of the world afflicted by hostilities, such as Afghanistan and Kosovo. A programme pursuing such protection is being promoted by the Cultural Olympiad in association with UNESCO.

As part of the preparations for the Olympic Games and the Cultural Olympiad, the New Acropolis Museum is currently under construction in Athens. It is our hope that the new museum will provide a home for the Parthenon Marbles in their entirety, which, unfortunately, are currently divided between Athens and London. We very much hope that the proposals we have put forward for the organization of a joint exhibition of the Parthenon sculptures in Athens, under the aegis of the Museum of the Acropolis and the British Museum, will eventually be accepted. Our proposal is to assure the return of the marbles to Athens in the legal form of a long-term loan from the British Museum to the new Museum of the Acropolis.

Greece is a country in which cultural heritage is celebrated every day. In Europe, as you know, we devote certain days each year to the commemoration of the common European cultural heritage. I believe it would be useful to devote one day each year to the celebration of our global cultural heritage — a day when all the monuments belonging to the UNESCO list of world heritage sites will be open to the public, sending a message of the universality of cultural heritage.

The protection of the cultural heritage of the world's countries must be regarded as a duty resting in the hands of humanity as a whole. Such a responsibility will never be seen as anything more than a romantic ideal unless practical measures are taken providing international financial aid in support of that specific objective. It is my belief that such a provision must be included in any relevant resolution to be adopted by the General Assembly.

Mr. Wang Yingfan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): It is, indeed, timely and necessary that the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly proclaimed 2002 as the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage. Cultural heritage bears witness to the development of human society and serves as an essential carrier of human civilization. It has played a vital part in the promotion of mutual understanding among countries, as well as in the enhancement of communication among different cultures and civilizations. To protect and to make good use of world cultural heritage is a common responsibility of all people in the world. This year, in observation of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, UNESCO and other agencies have been organizing a series of events and activities. UNESCO has made tremendous efforts to raise public awareness throughout the world for the protection of cultural heritage. Its efforts are reaping very good results. For that, we would like to express our appreciation.

China is a country with an ancient civilization and a long history. China has numerous natural and cultural relics. They are not only the invaluable heritage of the Chinese nation but an important part of the world cultural and natural heritage, as well. The Chinese Government has always attached importance to the protection, construction, planning and management of scenic spots and places of cultural interest, as well as to historical sites. It has persistently followed the guiding principle of vigorous protection, integrated management, sound development and sustainable utilization. In the process of its economic development, China is making all efforts to preserve historical and cultural sites and has zealously devoted itself to reconciling history with modern times so that they may coexist harmoniously. China has so far registered 28 world cultural and natural heritage sites. It has always actively supported and participated in UNESCO's activities for the development and protection of the world cultural and natural heritage. It has already acceded to three international conventions,

including the Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage. China has made its efforts and done its part in contributing to the protection of world cultural and natural heritage.

Cultural heritage belongs to not only one country and one nation but to all humankind. To protect cultural heritage is to protect the common history of humankind. As one of the sponsors of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, China stands ready to make concerted efforts with the rest of the international community to protect and to make good use of the rich historic and cultural heritage of humankind.

In observation of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, the Chinese Mission and UNESCO are currently sponsoring a World Cultural Heritage photo exhibition. We hope that this exhibition will play an active role in fostering the protection and use of cultural heritage.

Mr. McIvor (New Zealand): New Zealand is pleased to acknowledge and join the celebration of 4 December as the day for Cultural Heritage, marking the end of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage. We would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to all involved in organizing the year, particularly the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for its lead role.

There is a well-known mountain on New Zealand's North Island called Mount Tongariro. It is volcanic, a massive cone that, fortunately, remains dormant most of the time. This mountain, together with its surrounding land, became New Zealand's first national park well over 100 years ago. It was also the first of three New Zealand sites to be inscribed on the World Heritage List. Tongariro National Park is on the List as both a natural and cultural site, due to its largely unspoiled natural landscape and strong indigenous cultural association.

Tongariro is a part of New Zealand that we are pleased to share through the World Heritage Convention, as part of the international community's collective cultural heritage. Given its geographical location, it is also, incidentally, the first site of recognized global cultural heritage to be warmed by the sun of the new day. In a way, the world's commitment to the Year of Cultural Heritage began at the summit of that mountain in December 2001 and will end there too. Tongariro, including the cultural values which are part of its very being, has been strengthened by the International Year now drawing to a close.

New Zealand's official celebrations to mark this year's Day for Cultural Heritage began with a dawn ceremony performed this morning by the leaders of the Tangata Whenua, the indigenous people of New Zealand. These celebrations involved a wide range of ethnic communities which together make up the diverse cultural fabric of New Zealand society. These groups also participated in a series of activities that took place throughout New Zealand during the past year.

The South Pacific — its ocean and lands — covers almost one third of the earth's surface. It is rich in cultural heritage, of which those of us from that part of the world are naturally very proud. It is an honour for New Zealand to have announced just a few weeks ago its candidature for a seat on the World Heritage Committee at next year's elections, where we will want to represent our home region, including all that it offers to the world's cultural heritage.

New Zealand supports ongoing efforts by the international community to promote and protect the world's cultural heritage. As part of our commitment, New Zealand is pleased to offer its support for the draft resolution on the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage.

Mr. Maiga (Mali) (*spoke in French*): The celebration today of the conclusion of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage provides us with the opportunity to take stock of actions taken to preserve, to make aware and to make use of cultural heritage and its contribution to strengthening peace and mutual understanding among nations of the world.

Cultural heritage as a set of artefacts and non-material values bequeathed to us by our ancestors, encompasses all that is tied to the history of a family, a town or a nation.

An indisputable witness of the past, cultural heritage is cultural identity, a feeling of belonging for each component of a nation and a source of inspiration. It is the treasure that bears the undeniable imprints of our past. One of the most important reasons for preserving cultural heritage is that it constitutes the main source of information about history. It is by looking at the past that we will be able to build the

present and the future. This has been the credo of all nations.

Recent history of African nations illustrates this very well. The independence of these nations has awakened a discussion of identity and an interest in the past. My country, Mali, situated at the heart of West Africa and at the crossroads of two worlds, black sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab-Berber world, possesses the richest and most diversified cultural heritage in West Africa. This heritage comes from the myriad archaeological sites of the interior delta of the Niger River, the lake-dwelling Mémazone and the illustrious architecture of the land of Djenné, Timbuktu, Ségou, as well as the sanctuaries of Tellem in the land of the Dogon. Already, three of these sites, namely, Timbuktu, Djenné and the Bangiagara cliffs are registered on UNESCO's World Heritage List. At present, with the registration of the Tomb of the Askias in Gao, for which a file is now being prepared with the help of UNESCO, we envisage that Mali, together with Ethiopia, will become the sub-Saharan African country with the greatest number of cultural riches on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

This is an opportunity to hail the actions of UNESCO. Despite its meagre financial means, it has been able to elicit a greater realization of the need to preserve cultural heritage and continues to take necessary action to protect historic sites and monuments that are without a doubt representative symbols of the way in which mankind has evolved through the ages.

The preservation of cultural heritage must remain at the heart of the international community's concerns. In various parts of the world, cultural heritage is threatened with destruction. The indifference of local populations and decision makers is often the result of a lack of knowledge, the main reason for the lack of protection of cultural heritage. Despite the wealth of Africa's cultural heritage and the numerous advantages it offers, the sector of preservation and re-evaluation of Africa's cultural heritage is only the subject of occasional projects with extremely limited funds.

The weak institutional capacity for protecting cultural heritage is exacerbated by the fact that populations do not always understand the need to protect their heritage. To this one must add the economic difficulties suffered by the developing countries. The preservation of cultural heritage is relegated to a secondary rank compared to such imperatives of development as achieving food self-sufficiency, industrialization and building socio-economic infrastructure. Thus, conserving one's heritage is relegated to low priority on the pretext of it being too expensive and not worth the small return on investment.

Likewise, the effects of globalization and the unprecedented developments in communications expose more than ever the most vulnerable peoples to the looting of their cultural heritage and the loss of their cultural identity.

The decade that has just come to an end was a decisive turning point in realizing the importance of culture in the process of development. Culture is of primary importance in the social, economic and political development of contemporary societies. The claim of cultural identity is necessary for developing countries in a world that is undergoing constant change. Cultural heritage is a factor of development for all countries. Its preservation and re-evaluation should not be considered synonymous with becoming introverted and insular in terms of traditions. Cultural heritage that is well preserved will maintain its values and thus attract both foreign and domestic visitors, thereby contributing to a country's economic development.

Preservation of cultural heritage of a people contributes to maintaining its cultural identity. Work in this area is not just for professionals in the field but must involve all people at the local level as well.

Culture is also an important factor that can contribute to strengthening peace within societies and among nations. As a pillar of ancient civilizations, Africa is confronted with conflict and war that make its population highly vulnerable as victims of atrocities. Facing this violence, we cannot be content merely with putting out the flames. Today, we have to find a way to act on the causes of these conflicts.

We know that our culture provides us with values that make it possible for us to keep crises that lead to war at a distance. With its numerous cultural practices in the area of conflict resolution, our culture is a tool for peace. The celebration of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage gives us an opportunity to think about strategies and actions to better preserve our cultural heritage.

In that regard, Mali is convinced that such strategies and actions can be centred around the following elements: greater involvement by people in the protection of cultural heritage; enhancing institutional capacity with regard to managing cultural heritage; promoting the fulfilment of the role of culture and its place in development; developing public and private cultural activities that could directly or indirectly raise awareness of the need to protect our cultural artefacts; training the owners of cultural sites and other elements of cultural heritage about how to protect them; creating local museums to preserve cultural artefacts; raising people's awareness about the role of cultural heritage in reducing poverty and establishing an inventory of cultural heritage.

The celebration of the end of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage must also be a starting point to bring about national and international realization of the need for greater mobilization and a firm commitment to preserve the common heritage of mankind. That must be translated into substantive support for the efforts of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and of the relevant national institutions.

Mr. Morikawa (Japan): The United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage concludes today. Over the past year, many efforts have been made by different parties, led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Natural and Cultural Heritage, the Venice Congress was held from 14 to 16 November, with a view to raising awareness of the necessity of safeguarding the cultural heritage of humankind and accelerating concrete efforts to that end.

As a serious participant in these joint efforts, the Government of Japan expects that the UNESCO report to be presented at the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly — hopefully by its Director-General, Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura — will chart the direction for the mid- and long-term follow-up efforts of the international community on the basis of the outcome of the Year.

Having said that, I would like to touch upon two issues to which my Government attaches great importance. First, efforts to safeguard cultural heritage should be better coordinated with other United Nations activities. The rebuilding of cultural landmarks systematically destroyed during conflicts, such as the Mostar bridge, which is an important part of the Bosnian cultural heritage in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is a symbolic effort towards reconciliation and coexistence that will contribute to the peace-building process.

In Cambodia, Angkor has always been a symbol of national unity, and it has now become a focal point of international cooperation in the restoration and preservation of invaluable historical monuments. My Government has been taking part in that fruitful cooperation through the UNESCO/Japan Trust Fund for the Preservation of World Cultural Heritage. In recent years, the Angkor site has become an important foothold for the social and economic development of Cambodia.

Secondly, the international community should strengthen its efforts to preserve its intangible cultural heritage. I am convinced that safeguarding that heritage will play an increasingly important role in our culture and society, as it is a reflection of the creativity and diversity of the human spirit. Facing the profound changes that were occurring in its society due to rapid industrialization, Japan adopted legislation in this area as early as 1950. We believe that our experience might serve as a useful reference for many countries facing the unprecedented trend towards globalization. Through the UNESCO/Japan Trust Fund for intangible cultural heritage, which was established in 1993, the Japanese Government has been very actively contributing to such UNESCO efforts as its 1993 proclamation of masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity.

Miss Clarke (Barbados), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Furthermore, my delegation welcomes the steps taken so far by UNESCO and the international community towards the adoption of the convention for the safeguard of intangible cultural heritage. We are ready to participate actively in the negotiations on this subject, with a view to the adoption of the convention by UNESCO's General Conference at its thirty-third session.

As was declared by UNESCO's Director-General last year, after the adoption of resolution 56/8, proclaiming the year 2002 as the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, all have a stake in the common

heritage of humanity, regardless of geographic location. Safeguarding the cultural heritage of humankind requires tireless and continuous efforts on the part of each and every partner in the international community. I would like to conclude my statement by assuring the Assembly of the determination of the Government of Japan to continue to participate in the efforts of the international community under the leadership of UNESCO.

Mr. Kulyk (Ukraine): As we mark the end of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage — which, symbolically, coincides with the thirtieth anniversary of the World Heritage Convention — my delegation notes with satisfaction the tangible results achieved by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Heritage Committee in this area.

I should like to avail myself of this opportunity to express special gratitude to Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, UNESCO Director-General. We hope that his overview of the activities carried out during the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, together with the report of the Secretary-General, will not only give us a clear and comprehensive picture of the progress that has been made to date, but also determine practical ways to move forward. Since UNESCO has been designated as the lead agency for the Year, it is important, in our view, to continue the important work that has already been done.

We would like in particular to reaffirm the importance of the further development of international mechanisms to protect the world cultural heritage. To that end, we believe that it would be helpful to hold an international conference to review the effectiveness of current international instruments in this field and to promote the drafting of new international standard-setting instruments.

From our perspective, such an initiative is in keeping with the guidelines of UNESCO's strategy to promote international cooperation to protect the world cultural heritage. Indeed, it could become a useful tool in addressing new demands in the area of standard-setting and in encouraging Member States to take appropriate measures in this regard.

Ukraine — a country that still feels the pain of having seen its churches ruined, its archives burned and its art masterpieces destroyed — has always been, and remains, a strong advocate of the consolidated international efforts aimed at protecting the global and national cultural heritage. In the framework of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, Ukraine has taken practical steps to promote our country's cultural heritage.

First, in keeping with our National Plan of Action, we have focused our efforts on the further improvement of national legislation in this field. So far, a number of international legal acts have been prepared for ratification by the Ukrainian Parliament; in particular, we expect that the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage will be ratified in the near future.

We have also successfully implemented a number of technical and economic projects in order to ensure that Ukraine's heritage is well protected at both the national and local levels. For this purpose, a national programme aimed at safeguarding our cultural heritage was elaborated in order to ensure the necessary funding from national and local budgets.

Thirdly, our country has actively continued to select new cultural and natural properties and to prepare them for inscription on the World Heritage List. In this regard, I would like to inform the Assembly that in 2003 and 2004 Ukraine will host two regional seminars to determine cultural and natural properties for inscription on the World Heritage List.

Let me conclude by expressing Ukraine's strong commitment and readiness to further contribute to the efforts of the United Nations aimed at reaching the lofty goal of protecting the world cultural heritage.

Here I would like also to express our sincere appreciation to the delegation of Egypt for coordinating a draft resolution on the agenda item under our consideration. We hope that this important document will soon be successfully adopted by the General Assembly.

Mr. Cappagli (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): The principal goal of the draft resolution that is to be introduced in due course before the General Assembly, and which my country intends to co-sponsor, will not be solely to conclude today the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage. Rather — and especially — it will be to invite Member States to work together with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to continue to promote and protect the world cultural heritage, through an ongoing

process of consciousness-raising and education with respect to national and world patrimony.

Argentina recognizes and appreciates the invaluable role that UNESCO has been playing in the protection of the world cultural heritage and commends the work it has done in that field, and expects that it will continue to lead the way in this process of preserving the world heritage.

The fact that more than 700 sites have been inscribed on the World Heritage List is clear testimony to the importance that Member States attach to the preservation of such heritage. However, many of these sites have deteriorated or are in danger of ruin. The international community must therefore continue to pool its efforts and to cooperate to protect that heritage, on the understanding that to harm it is to harm also our memory and our shared legacy.

As we pointed out last year, the commemoration of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage coincided with the thirtieth anniversary of the World Heritage Convention, which my country deems particularly important. That Convention has to date received more than 170 ratifications and has thus become a kind of universal Convention that provides a frame of reference for all legal instruments designed to protect our cultural heritage in all its aspects. Thus, it has become an instrument for the sustainable development of all societies through dialogue and mutual understanding.

Argentina avails itself of this opportunity to renew its commitment to protecting not only cultural heritage but also our own, as well as the global, natural heritage. We should like to refer in this regard to two key aspects: the role of local communities in heritage protection and the need to generate additional resources towards that end.

Local communities have a pivotal role in the identification, protection and management of cultural and natural heritage. In this sense, supporting these communities — their know-how and their traditional practices — is of the essence for preserving that heritage, in particular with regard to cultural landscapes. That is why projects aimed at protecting natural and cultural heritage should be considered concrete ways of cooperating in the economic and social development of peoples and, in that vein, as concrete ways of reweaving a social fabric rent asunder by crises of all kinds.

Secondly, we must come up with additional resources through innovative initiatives such the World Heritage Partnerships Initiative, which was welcomed by the World Heritage Committee this year, so that, through cooperation with partners in civil society and the private sector, we can generate the wherewithal to allow us to protect global heritage sites in the short, medium and long term, and to ensure the proper training of the human resources needed to preserve and manage them.

Argentina urges those countries that have not yet done so to accede to the World Heritage Convention and to other international legal instruments related to the protection of cultural heritage. These include, in particular, the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols, the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property and the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage. I should like to point out the importance of the fact that all of UNESCO's legal instruments designed to protect the cultural heritage are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

The commemoration of the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage provided a framework for the international community to conduct a series of events designed to sensitize the world to the importance of preserving that heritage for generations to come.

With regard to activities by my country to disseminate information and provide training, I would like to highlight, inter alia, the holding in August, in the province of Córdoba, of the second seminar on the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, which took place near the Jesuit Block and Estancias of Córdoba — a site that has been on the World Heritage List since 2000; the conference on the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, which took place from 30 October to 1 November; and initiatives in various areas, such as among national police forces and at peacekeeping operations training centres, to provide information about the content and scope of UNESCO conventions relating to the protection of the cultural heritage, as well as their relevance during rebuilding phases.

Above and beyond our work at the national level, Argentina actively participates in UNESCO's standard-setting activities. In particular, we played a very active

role in negotiations leading up to the recent adoption of the Convention of the Underwater Cultural Heritage; in the review process for the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, currently under way; and in the ongoing negotiations to elaborate an instrument to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage.

I should like to conclude by reaffirming Argentina's commitment to protecting the world heritage and our readiness to continue to work in all relevant forums to preserve that heritage.

Mr. Vento (Italy): Given its cultural traditions and artistic history, Italy accords the highest priority to the cause of world heritage. That is why we wholeheartedly supported the proclamation of 2002 as the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage. We welcome the fact that that proclamation coincided with the thirtieth anniversary of the World Heritage Convention, which was celebrated in Venice from 14 to 16 November with a special United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) conference, entitled "World Heritage 2002: Shared Legacy, Common Responsibility", hosted by the Italian Government. Over the past two decades, Italy has hosted a number of UNESCO events on cultural heritage, including sessions of the Cultural Heritage Committee in Florence in 1983 and in Naples in 1987 and, more recently, the Culture Counts Conference, hosted in Florence in 1999, jointly sponsored by the World Bank, UNESCO and Italy.

The Venice conference in November brought together 600 experts from all over the world and successfully promoted awareness of the need for greater investment in cultural heritage as a vehicle for development and international cohesion. It also fostered the broad recognition that the Convention, ratified by 175 States parties, is still the most valid and universal international legal instrument to safeguard cultural and natural heritage. Nevertheless, during the conference it became clear that there was a need to explore an evolved and integrated interpretation of the Convention, respecting its spirit and objectives while at the same time responding to new problems, in conjunction with other directly or indirectly applicable instruments of international law.

The Convention has succeeded in forging a universally accepted compromise between the seemingly opposed concepts of culture and nature, national sovereignty and international responsibility, and cultural identity and universality. In that sense, the Convention represents a new and unsurpassed affirmation of responsibility-sharing and interdependency among generations, States, civil society and new transnational actors — non-governmental organizations, community associations and the international community players — in the safeguarding of the human environment.

Italy has always shared the spirit of the World Heritage Convention, which requires its States parties to ensure the identification, conservation, enhancement and transmission to future generations of their own cultural and natural heritage. The World Heritage List, on which 730 sites are currently registered, is a major instrument of that mission.

We are well aware of the practical problems in managing such a long and varied list, and fully share the goal of achieving better balance and representation on it. To that end, the broadest possible support should be given to international cooperation, helping developing countries to build their capacity to identify and safeguard their heritage, pursuant to article 7 of the Convention.

In Italy's view, the World Heritage List must be characterized by credibility, rigorous evaluation criteria and, last but not least, dynamism. To achieve dialogue between cultures and preserve historical memory for future generations, it is not enough to protect the tangible heritage. It is in this conviction that Italy welcomes the priority that the Director-General of UNESCO has given to the protection of the intangible heritage, which by 2005 should lead to the adoption of a special legal instrument in that respect.

Adequate management of heritage is another top priority. Traditional conservation norms need to be backed up by adequate tools that harmonize conservation needs with the socio-economic capabilities involved in the enhancement process. To that end, the Italian Government is currently drafting model managing plans to serve as a point of reference for the numerous sites and parks of national importance that we have defined as cultural areas and districts. We use that term to refer to urban and extra-urban areas whose characteristics as sites of cultural activities point to their need for management through an integrated system of transportation, tourism and services. The aim is to enhance and promote both tangible and intangible

cultural resources. Italy is also in the process of approving a law that will provide for the establishment of local tourist systems. Those systems will provide new tools for joining the public and private sectors in a cooperative effort to promote integrated tourism strategies in areas with significant cultural connotations.

Italy will continue to support UNESCO's activities for the cause of world heritage with commitment and conviction. For several years now, we have dedicated extrabudgetary funds to capacity-building activities in various countries. Since 2001, when it signed a Joint Declaration with UNESCO, Italy has contributed $750,000 to support the institutional activities of the World Heritage Centre, with a particular view to promoting a global strategy aimed at widening the range of sites inscribed on the List and to enhancing the Centre's management capabilities. As another example of our dedication to the cause of world heritage, I can mention that, following the inscription on the List of the Minaret of Jam in Afghanistan, Italy immediately contributed $500,000 to the project for its consolidation.

The same spirit of solidarity that motivated us to participate in several UNESCO projects has inspired our bilateral cooperation. This is focused mostly on joint projects for the protection and restoration of monuments, on archaeological research and feasibility studies of natural and cultural parks and on the use of modern technologies for the recovery of stolen cultural heritage. In all those undertakings, particular attention is paid to training and the development of local expertise.

The preservation and enhancement of the world cultural heritage is at the core of the interests and the responsibilities of the international community and of UNESCO, a body that it is our collective duty to constantly make more relevant and effective. The full re-entry of the United States into the Paris-based organization, which my Government warmly welcomes, will certainly contribute significantly to the fulfilment of that lofty goal.

Safeguarding the cultural, natural and intangible heritage is perhaps the most concrete way to preserve cultural diversity and to meet one of today's main challenges: how to harmonize the process of globalization with the needs of local and non-mainstream cultures. In that area too, Italy can make a contribution by sharing its own experience. In fact, it would be difficult to find a more diverse culture within such a relatively small territory anywhere else in the world. As a result of our geography and our history, we inherited a nearly unrivalled density of languages, legacies and traditions. Yet we have also succeeded in building a unified system that teaches tolerance and respect for diversity, promoting peaceful coexistence in a process of intellectual human and social enrichment.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 23. The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 23.

Reports of the Fifth Committee

The Acting President: The General Assembly will now consider the reports of the Fifth Committee on agenda item 12 and on sub-items (a) to (e) and (j) of agenda item 17.

If there is no proposal under rule 66 of the rules of procedure, I shall take it that the General Assembly decides not to discuss the reports of the Fifth Committee that are before the Assembly today.

It was so decided.

The Acting President: Statements will therefore be limited to explanations of vote. The positions of delegations regarding the recommendations of the Fifth Committee have been made clear in the Committee and are reflected in the relevant official records. May I remind members that, under paragraph 7 of decision 34/401, the General Assembly agreed that

> "When the same draft resolution is considered in a Main Committee and in plenary meeting, a delegation should, as far as possible, explain its vote only once, i.e., either in the Committee or in plenary meeting, unless that delegation's vote in plenary meeting is different from its vote in the Committee."

May remind delegations that, also in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes.

Before we begin to take action on the recommendations contained in the reports of the Fifth Committee, I should like to advise representatives that we shall proceed to take decisions in the same manner

as was done in the Fifth Committee, unless the Secretariat is notified otherwise.

Agenda item 12 (*continued*)

Report of the Economic and Social Council

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/57/624)

The Acting President: The Assembly will now consider the report of the Fifth Committee dealing with those chapters of the report of the Economic and Social Council that were allocated to the Fifth Committee. The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft decision recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 4 of its report.

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to adopt the draft decision?

The draft decision was adopted (decision 57/517).

The Acting President: The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 12.

Agenda item 17

Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments

(a) Appointment of members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/57/605)

The Acting President: The Fifth Committee recommends in paragraph 7 of its report that the General Assembly appoint the following persons as members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for a three-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2003: Mr. Homero Luis Hernández (Dominican Republic), Mr. Vladimir Kuznetsov (Russian Federation), Mr. Thomas Mazet (Germany), Ms. Susan McLurg (United States of America) and Mr. Mounir Zahran (Egypt).

May I take it that the Assembly appoints those persons?

It was so decided.

(b) Appointment of members of the Committee on Contributions

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/57/606)

The Acting President: In paragraph 5 of its report, the Fifth Committee recommends that the General Assembly appoint the following persons as members of the Committee on Contributions for a three-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2003: Mr. Alvaro Gurgel de Alencar (Brazil), Mr. Sergei I. Mareyev (Russian Federation), Mr. Bernard G. Meijerman (Netherlands), Mr. Hae-yun Park (Republic of Korea), Mr. Ugo Sessi (Italy) and Mr. Wu Gang (China).

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to appoint those persons?

It was so decided.

(c) Confirmation of the appointment of members of the Investments Committee

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/57/607)

The Acting President: The Fifth Committee recommends in paragraph 5 of its report that the General Assembly confirm the appointment by the Secretary-General of the following persons as members of the Investments Committee for a three-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2003: Ms. Francine J. Bovich (United States of America), Mr. Takeshi Ohta (Japan) and Mr. Peter Stormonth-Darling (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland).

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to confirm the appointment of those persons?

It was so decided.

(d) Appointment of members of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/57/608)

The Acting President: In paragraph 5 of its report, the Fifth Committee recommends that the General Assembly appoint the following persons as members of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal for a four-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2003: Mr. Kevin Haugh (Ireland) and Ms. Jacqueline R. Scott (United States of America).

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to appoint those persons?

It was so decided.

(e) International Civil Service Commission

(i) Appointment of members of the Commission

(ii) Designation of the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman of the Commission

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/57/609)

The Acting President: In paragraph 10 (a) of its report, the Fifth Committee recommends that the General Assembly appoint the following persons as members of the International Civil Service Commission for a four-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2003: Mr. Mohsen Bel Hadj Amor (Tunisia), Mr. Daasebre Oti Boateng (Ghana), Mr. José Ramón Sanchis Muñoz (Argentina), Ms. Anita Szlazak (Canada) and Mr. Eugeniusz Wyzner (Poland).

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to appoint those persons?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: The Fifth Committee also recommends, in paragraph 10 (b) of its report, that the General Assembly designate Mr. Mohsen Bel Hadj Amor (Tunisia) as Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission for a four-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2003.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to designate the person recommended as Chairman of the Commission?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: In paragraph 10 (c) of its report, the Fifth Committee further recommends that the General Assembly designate Mr. Eugeniusz Wyzner as Vice-Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission for a four-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2003.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to designate the person recommended as Vice-Chairman of the Commission?

It was so decided.

(j) Appointment of a member of the United Nations Staff Pension Committee

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/57/610)

The Acting President: In paragraph 5 of its report, the Fifth Committee recommends that the General Assembly appoint Mr. Andrei Vitalievitch Kovalenko (Russian Federation) as a member of the United Nations Staff Pension Committee for a term of office beginning on 1 January 2003 and ending on 31 December 2003.

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to appoint Mr. Kovalenko?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 17.

Agenda item 47

Declaration of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity on the aerial and naval military attack against the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya by the present United States Administration in April 1986

The Acting President: It is my understanding that after the necessary consultations, consideration of this item may be deferred to the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to defer consideration of this item and to include it in the provisional agenda of the fifty-eighth session?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: This concludes our consideration of agenda item 47.

Agenda item 48

Armed Israeli aggression against the Iraqi nuclear installations and its grave consequences for the established international system concerning the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and international peace and security

The Acting President: It is my understanding that it would be desirable to defer consideration of this

item to the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to defer consideration of this item and to include it in the provisional agenda of the fifty-eighth session?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: This concludes our consideration of agenda item 48.

Agenda item 49

Consequences of the Iraqi occupation of and aggression against Kuwait

The Acting President: It is my understanding that it would be desirable to defer consideration of this item to the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to defer consideration of this item and to include it in the provisional agenda of the fifty-eighth session?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: This concludes our consideration of agenda item 49.

Agenda item 50

Implementation of the resolutions of the United Nations

The Acting President: It is my understanding that there is no request to consider this item at the present session.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to defer consideration of this item and to include this item in the provisional agenda for the fifty-eighth session?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: This concludes our consideration of agenda item 50.

Agenda item 51

Launching of global negotiations on international economic cooperation for development

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the Assembly's wish to defer consideration of this item and to include it in the provisional agenda of the fifty-eighth session?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: This concludes our consideration of agenda item 51.

Programme of work

The President in the Chair.

The President: I would like to announce that the open-ended informal consultations of the plenary of the General Assembly on United Nations reform, which, as the Assembly is aware, were scheduled for the afternoon of Friday, 6 December 2002, have been postponed until next week. The exact date of the informal consultations will be announced at the plenary meeting to be held on the morning of Friday, 6 December.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.